

THE AMERICAN Legion

The magazine of America's veterans

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OUR WAR

A SPECIAL REPORT
THE POST-9/11 VETERAN



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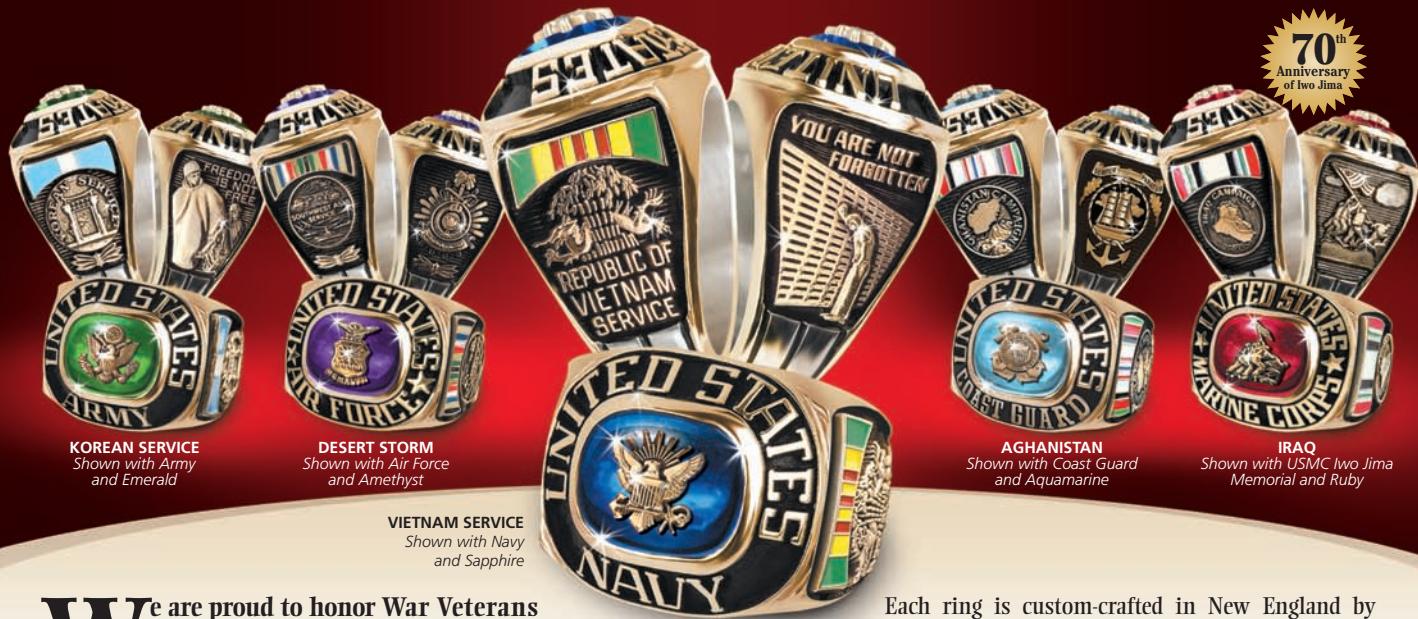
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By Wilem S. Wong

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COVER: "WHY I AM HERE"

Legionnaire and post-9/11 generation veteran Wilem Wong places a U.S. flag at the engraved name of Michael Edward Roberts, one of 343 New York City Fire Department firefighters who lost his life in the line of duty after the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001. Wong, who worked on the 86th floor of 2 World Trade Center from 1997 to 1999, was deployed to Afghanistan with the Army Reserve in 2011 when he received a prayer card from Roberts' uncle, New York City Police Department Chief of Transit Joseph Fox, thanking Wong for his service. "When I got the prayer card, I thought, 'This is why I am here.' I showed it to all my team members." Photo by Amy C. Elliott

THE LONGEST WAR

Soldiers with 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division, walk into the sunset to catch their flight out of Forward Operating Base Pacemaker near Kandahar, Afghanistan. The soldiers were on a mission to deliver holiday gifts of cookies, candy and personal hygiene products to the outlying FOB.

U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Ruth Pagan

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'The Cannabis Question'

I live in California, where I have a medical marijuana recommendation for chronic low back pain, insomnia and anxiety (July). On the pain scale, I bounce between 6 and 9. When it gets to about 8, I'll use some marijuana, and it decreases the pain by about 50 percent. I used to go a week or two at a time on two to three hours of sleep a day. A little marijuana, and I fall asleep faster and sleep longer before waking up.

I have yet to be prescribed a pain medication and I don't want one. My VA doctor doesn't seem to have a problem with it other than the fact that I am inhaling a foreign substance into my lungs. Providing this for those who need it would, in my opinion, prevent some from becoming dependent on drugs and/or alcohol.

— Gary Carpenter, Twentynine Palms, Calif.

I am a veteran of Army intelligence and retired from the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA). I also started a business to deal with drug abuse in the workplace. I have worked in areas of drug abuse prevention, drug enforcement and drug dependence for more than 50 years. I have lectured on the facts and science of drugs, particularly mind-altering drugs, over a thousand times. Two years ago I sold my company and am still writing and lecturing on drugs.

I am in favor of anything that helps veterans. But what may help must be carefully evaluated so it does not actually harm more than help.

The key chemicals in cannabis are only made by nature within the cannabis plant. These chemicals are psychotropic, meaning they

enter the brain and have distinctive effects. The effects can be mind-altering, intoxicating, psychedelic, addicting or maybe beneficial. The only way to determine safety and efficacy is by scientific studies. This is what happens when an investigational new drug (IND) goes through the FDA process.

The cannabis plant contains over 80 cannabinoids. The exact chemical structures vary depending on the strain of cannabis. Basically, most drugs – including most prescription drugs – are derived from plants. Perhaps we can add some medicines to the pharmacopeia from cannabis, but there is a right way and a wrong way. The tried-and-true FDA method is the right way. Physicians must also consider their Hippocratic Oath: do no harm.

— Harold C. Patin, Metairie, La.

It is of no consequence that cannabis has not been proven to be effective. If a veteran thinks he is getting a benefit, he is. Pharmacy shelves are filled with drugs whose only purpose is not to cure, but to make one feel better. For an authoritarian and moralistic government to capriciously criminalize cannabis is a violation of human rights.

—Mike Hogan, Castle Rock, Colo.

If the plant has great value, why haven't the medical profession and drug companies taken from it what works and produced a pill obtainable only by prescription? All who sell, use or grow the stuff (except as noted above) should be most severely punished. Its apparently widespread use is purely to render the nation a bunch of stupid, worthless druggies some nation will find easy to defeat.

—James G. Hudkins, Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio

While Ken Olsen did a good story on the cannabis question, he had some errors and missing actions. According to Ohio Attorney General Mike DeWine, Ohio still charges and convicts people for having pot. It has never decriminalized it. And it makes no difference if a state says it's OK to have or use pot; the Constitution's Article VI says that if a state law is found to be in conflict with a federal law or the Constitution, the latter are supreme. As of today, federal law still says pot is illegal.

If you are using pot for PTSD and such, you have my sympathy. But for God's sake, do

not accidentally take any pot onto a VA campus or smoke it in your car while going over. Because pot is illegal under federal law, if you are caught with any on the property or are found with any in your system, VA police will bust you. And VAMC staff is required by VA regulations and federal law to alert VA police and authorities that you have this in your blood. Either case could lead to you being charged and convicted. If convicted, you lose all VA benefits as well as the ability to see any VA doctor. You would lose your VA pension, and there is even a chance you would lose your military pension.

—Daniel E. Gray, Defiance, Ohio

The last thing a person who cannot handle daily life needs is the depressant marijuana. That person will never get the energy needed to do something about his or her life. Keeping busy, volunteering and thinking about something other than yourself is a big part of the answer. This does not include being stoned most of the time.

—Denise Feller, East Helena, Mont.

'The Last Thing We Want to Happen'

Thanks for Alan W. Dowd's article on Operation Power Pack (July). I was in the 82nd Airborne Division, C Battery, 319th Artillery, as the battery commander's driver. The article gave me more insight as why we were there. I'm sure we were told a little about our mission, but this filled in a lot of blanks.

—Larry W. Holland, Swansboro, N.C.

I wish to thank the author for his fine article on the Dominican Republic civil war. I was there through 1965 and never quite understood who was who. My ship was one of 11 World War II LSTs that made multiple trips from Little Creek, Va. In fact, several brought in the tanks that rolled into Santo Domingo to end the fighting. On our return trip we carried a group of 82nd Airborne boys home.

—Jim Serpa, Mesa, Ariz.

Boys State memories

The July Commander's Message brought back memories of when I attended Boys State in 1951. I was one of those young guys who gathered at the Illinois State Fairgrounds, where The American Legion housed us in a 4-H building. Since I played trumpet in our high school band, I volunteered to play in the Boys State band. We attended classes centered around organizing a political platform and nominating candidates to run for office. It was indeed an education, for Boys State inspired me later to work for the Illinois state government in Springfield. I held several positions, starting at the Department of Mental Health & Disabilities. A couple of years later, I was nominated to be budget director for the Illinois Department of Labor. Looking back, I can say that week transformed my understanding of governmental operations. A few years ago, my grandson attended Illinois Boys State. Thank you, American Legion.

—Ronald L. Baker, Springfield, Va.

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30109

The post-9/11 generation's place in history

Most veterans of the post-9/11 wars have been home for some time, but in many ways America is just getting to know them.

Thousands are transitioning out of the military or retiring from service, opening new chapters in their lives. Others who have fought in this long war hung up their uniforms years ago and are paying it forward today as Legionnaires, veterans helping veterans, building new careers, raising families and leading communities.

In your hometown and mine, these men and women are eager to enjoy the freedoms for which they fought. They're taking college classes. They're applying for jobs. They're owning and operating businesses. They're volunteering in their communities and running for elected offices. This is their moment.

Yet the ordinary veteran's experience, and success, often doesn't make the news. Post-traumatic stress disorder, traumatic brain injury, prosthetic limbs, and VA's struggles to keep pace with patient numbers and claims certainly demand our attention and action. But that's only part of the story of this extraordinary generation of veterans.

There's a myth that our veterans "are somehow damaged goods," retired Marine Corps Gen. James Mattis said in a speech at the Marines' Memorial Club in San Francisco last year. "I don't buy it."

Unfortunately, when "wounded" is emphasized over "warrior," a misleading narrative can take shape: that veterans are victims traumatized by war. That can indeed happen, but for the majority of those who served in combat, it's just not the case.

Having come of age in the Vietnam era, when troop support hit an all-time low, I'm gratified that Americans today are united in caring for our servicemembers, no matter how they feel about the war on terrorism. The Internet and social media, too, have made us ever more aware of the bravery and sacrifice of our troops – not to mention the toll of their injuries, physical and mental. We see their pictures, we read about their struggles and, understandably, we're moved. Headlines about PTSD and veteran suicide rates add to our concern.

Let me tell you, though, what I know about these veterans. First, all of the more than 2.5 million men and women who deployed to the war theaters were volunteers. National Guard and reserve personnel commonly left civilian lives behind for two or more tours.

Second, combat was unique for post-9/11 veterans. Roadside bombs, shifting political and religious tensions, and no easy way to distinguish civilians from combatants posed unprecedented challenges that our troops met head-on, and continue to meet.

On bases, in hospitals and at job fairs, I've met hundreds of these young veterans, and none have shown regret for the sacrifices they have made, nor do they seek sympathy from anyone. Before the nation ever asked, they declared their willingness to serve and, if necessary, give their lives in our defense. They deserve our pride and support. With that, I thank those who have served during this war – including two of my own sons – all of whom are carving out a place in history that belongs entirely to them.



National Commander
Michael D. Helm

MEMORANDA

ANNUAL REPORT

The American Legion's 2015 Annual Report is available and free for download, illustrating the many ways the Legion made differences for the nation and individuals alike over the past year.

www.legion.org/publications

NATIONAL DISASTER PREPAREDNESS MONTH

September is National Disaster Preparedness Month. In 2006, the Legion signed a statement of affiliation with the Federal Emergency Management Agency, and works with the Department of Homeland Security to promote disaster preparedness and response. The Legion has made available and free for download "Disaster Preparedness and Response for American Legion Posts," detailing how posts can help their communities plan for and survive a catastrophe, from supplies to communications.

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NATIONAL POW/MIA RECOGNITION DAY

The day set aside to honor former prisoners of war and those still missing in action falls on Sept. 18 this year. A designated POW/MIA Empty Chair is present at all official meetings of The American Legion.

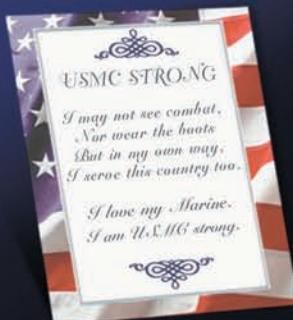
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- JROTC mentorship program (2015-2016)

THERESEA CRUZ

Theresea Cruz is a mother of eight, a grandmother and a full-time client account executive. She's also an Army veteran and the first female commander of American Legion Post 436 in Jourdanton, Texas.

Her father, William Sikonia, inspired Cruz to serve the nation and, later, the Legion. "I joined the military because of my father. I was so proud of him being in the 82nd Airborne Division."

Those feelings were mutual. "He would be so excited when I came home for a visit and would say, 'Let's grab a beer at The American Legion,'" Cruz says. "I remember that moment of sharing a beer and talking shop with my dad. The American Legion holds a special memory for me."

Now, as commander, she is passionate about her three-year plan to reinvigorate the post and create a family atmosphere. Members are re-engaged and embarking on new projects: raising funds for an oratorical contest, hosting veterans benefits forums, and launching a Legion Riders chapter, a new Auxiliary unit and a Sons of The American Legion squadron.

Knowing that her gender and generation might be surprising to some members, she relies on the lessons she learned from her father and service.

"My children spend a lot of time here (at the post) because my husband Isaias and I are both officers," she says. "I consider my officers my team, my family, my support group. This is my family and my home. But it's not my Legion, as commander – it's our Legion."

Watch an interview with Theresea Cruz online:

➲ www.legion.org/magazine

See an archive of past interviews:

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Photo by Clay Lommeth



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Pain-Capable Unborn Child Protection Act



SUPPORT

Rep. Diane Black, R-Tenn.

■ Black is on the House Committee on Ways and Means.

More than 40 years ago, I became a nurse and took a vow to “devote myself to the welfare of those committed to my care.” At the time, our understanding of science limited the extent to which I could fulfill that promise.

Early in my career, if a woman came into our hospital in labor at 32 weeks, the odds of saving her child were slim. Today, however, babies are being saved as early as 22 weeks into fetal development. What’s more, there is significant evidence that by 20 weeks, unborn children have the capacity to feel pain.

Sadly, while we celebrate advances in technology that prove life has value and worth before leaving the hospital, we continue to be one of only seven nations that allow elective late-term abortions – putting the United States in the same category as countries like Vietnam and North Korea.

Polls consistently show that upward of 60 percent of Americans support putting an end to the dangerous and inhumane practice of late-term abortions. These numbers will only increase as we become more aware of the pain these babies experience during abortion and the evidence supporting their viability at increasingly early stages of development.

To that end, the House of Representatives voted to pass the Pain-Capable Unborn Child Protection Act, which will provide federal legal protection for unborn children at 20 weeks with exceptions to save the life of the mother or in cases of rape and incest.

In the year 2015, the United States has no business ending the lives of babies who can live outside the womb. Science agrees, and so do the majority of Americans. The Pain-Capable Unborn Child Protection Act will right this wrong.



OPPOSE

Rep. Rosa DeLauro, D-Conn.

■ DeLauro is a member of the House Appropriations Committee.

Women deserve to be trusted to make medical decisions in private consultation with their doctors and families, not politicians serving in Washington. That should be the starting point for any discussion on abortion.

I strongly opposed the anti-choice legislation put forward by the House majority because it would jeopardize women’s health and rights. My colleagues across the aisle claim to be against govern-

ment overreach, but this bill would extend such reach straight into the doctor’s office. That is the height of hypocrisy, not to mention an unwarranted attack on the privacy of women experiencing unintended pregnancies – something half of all U.S. women will experience at some point in their lives.

Being in the majority is not an excuse to try to insert ideological preferences into law, yet that is exactly what this bill tries to do. It violates the principles laid out in *Roe v. Wade*, which has been settled law for more than 40 years.

Instead of polarizing the nation, we need to find common ground that allows us to move forward together. This is not an impossible task. Not long ago, Rep. Tim Ryan, D-Ohio, and I introduced legislation that brought together groups as varied as NARAL Pro-Choice America and the pro-life Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good.

The basic principle of our legislation was to reduce the number of abortions – surely a goal everyone can support. We proposed proven strategies that emphasize prevention, safe and affordable contraception, and family support. These are the most effective ways to prevent unintended pregnancies and abortions.

CONTACT YOUR ELECTED OFFICIALS

The Honorable (name), U.S. Senate, Washington, DC 20510 • Phone: (202) 224-3121

The Honorable (name), U.S. House of Representatives, Washington, DC 20515 • Phone: (202) 225-3121

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An alternative to appendectomies?

For non-emergency appendicitis attacks – known as “uncomplicated acute appendicitis” – appendectomies may be supplanted by antibiotics, according to a study published in *JAMA: The Journal of the American Medical Association*.

The Finnish study tracked 530 patients between 18 and 60, *The Independent* reports. Participants agreed to be randomly assigned to either antibiotic or surgical treatment for their appendicitis. Seventy-five percent of the 257 people who received antibiotics “recovered easily and did not require surgery.” The antibiotics were found to effectively counter inflammation of the appendix.

“This is quite a radical change in the line of thinking, because appendectomy has served patients well for over 100 years,” says Paulina Salminen, the study’s lead author.



Living Well is designed to provide general information. It is not intended to be, nor is it, medical advice. Readers should consult their physicians when they have health problems.

Every breath you take

For those with COPD, the struggle is daily and impossible to ignore.

BY MICHELLE GIBEAULT TRAUB

We take approximately 20,000 breaths per day. Breathing typically comes so easily that we don’t even notice it taking place. But for millions of Americans with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), the daily struggle to get enough oxygen is impossible to overlook.

COPD refers to several lung disorders, including bronchitis and emphysema. Its main characteristic is a difficulty in breathing that reduces the amount of oxygen able to enter the body. Symptoms include shortness of breath, tightness in the chest, frequent coughing (often with mucus) and wheezing.

In 2011, 15 million Americans were reported to have COPD, the third-leading cause of death in the country. Yet many more individuals have difficulty breathing, which leads some health professionals to believe that as many as 24 million people actually live with the disease.

The majority of patients with COPD have smoked at some point in their lives. Smoking or inhaling other air pollutants or



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chemicals damages tissues in the lungs responsible for taking in oxygen and releasing carbon dioxide. When lung tissue is damaged, mucus builds up, hindering airflow while driving the diaphragm to contract in an attempt to expel the sticky substance. This results in the chronic and often painful cough common in lung disease.

Unfortunately, once lung tissue is damaged it can’t be repaired. Avoiding smoke and air pollution is the only known way to prevent COPD, and quitting as soon as possible is the only way to halt the disease’s progression.

Treatment options for COPD focus on minimizing further lung inflammation, supporting the airways and thinning mucus so that breathing is easier. Medications are often utilized. Some individuals also require supplementary oxygen delivered via a tank.

Pulmonary rehabilitation programs help patients navigate the challenges of living with lung disease. Such programs teach patients how to conserve their energy levels and maximize their

See **BREATH** on page 16



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OF PEOPLE WHO HAVE
HEPATITIS C

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Sometimes hepatitis C (Hep C) can feel forgotten. After all, it's slow moving, with symptoms that may not appear for years. No wonder you try to push it to the back of your mind and forget it. But there's something that shouldn't be forgotten. Chronic Hep C is a serious disease that affects over three million people. And if left untreated, it can lead to liver damage and potentially liver cancer.

Here's the good news, you haven't been forgotten. There has never been a better time to rethink your Hep C, because people like you may benefit from scientific advances that could help cure your Hep C. Cure means the virus is not detected in the blood when measured three months after treatment is completed.

Call a Hep C Educator at **844-4HepcHope** who will help guide you in preparing a **personalized plan** for a conversation with your **Hep C specialist**. Register for more information at **HepcHope.com**.

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Fat fighters

Trying to fight belly fat? WebMD's Katherine Brooking points to four key ingredients to include if you want to win the battle of the bulge.

- **High-fiber foods** – including whole grains, legumes, fruits and vegetables – help you feel fuller longer. Also, research indicates that adults with high-fiber diets have less belly fat than those with low-fiber diets.
- **Monounsaturated fats** (MUFAs) are found in canola oil, avocados, olives, nuts and seeds. They can have a positive effect on abdominal fat. "Studies reveal that replacing saturated fats (fats found in whole dairy products, butter, cheese and red meat) with monounsaturated fats can induce a small but significant loss of body weight and fat mass,

without a significant change in total calorie or fat intake," Brooking says.

- **Probiotics** – bacteria with numerous health benefits – improve gastrointestinal function and strengthen the lining of the intestines. "Not only are probiotics beneficial for your gut bacteria, they may help fend off belly fat. In a 2010 Japanese study, 87 overweight participants took either a *Lactobacillus* probiotic or a placebo. After 12 weeks, the probiotic group reduced abdominal fat by 4.6 percent and overall body fat by 3.3 percent."

- **Vitamin D** helps regulate abdominal fat mass, "specifically helping to reduce visceral fat (deep abdominal fat) in obese adults." In addition, low levels of vitamin D are associated with increased fat in the muscle of otherwise healthy

young women.



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Healthy Mouth initiative brings free oral care to veterans

Like millions of other Americans, some veterans struggle to find oral health care when they need it, due to a lack of dentists in their area, availability or insurance coverage.

Recognizing this need, national dental-practice chain Aspen Dental is seeking to bridge the gap through its Healthy Mouth Movement, a community-giving initiative to deliver free dental care and oral health education to veterans.

Since April, the initiative has served hundreds of patients nationwide on a 42-foot MouthMobile, and more than 3,500 patients during a national day of service June 27, the largest single-day oral-health initiative for veterans. It continues this fall, with another national MouthMobile tour across 12 states.

 www.healthymouthmovement.com



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BREATH continued from page 14

oxygen intake. Special breathing techniques can help improve breathing efficiency.

Proper nutrition is also vital in managing the disease. Clarisa Webster, clinical dietitian at Yale-New Haven Hospital, says, "Small, frequent, high-calorie meals and snacks are recommended for people with COPD, because it takes more energy for them to breathe and they often have trouble maintaining a healthy weight."

Webster suggests that patients drink plenty of non-caffeinated beverages to thin mucus. Many nutrition experts also advise patients to avoid other things that can cause bloating and pressure on the lungs, such as excess sodium.

Digesting carbohydrates tends to require more oxygen. Therefore, limiting them by avoiding foods that contain added sugars can make breathing more efficient. Basing meals around high-quality protein and healthy fats may help meet nutritional needs while minimizing breathing challenges. Consuming antioxidant-rich foods such as deeply colored fruits and vegetables may also be beneficial to patients with COPD.

Everything we do requires oxygen. So if you or a loved one is having trouble breathing or experiencing a chronic cough, immediately seek the assistance of a trusted health professional. They can help you regain the oxygen you need.

Michelle Gibeault Traub is a dietitian and health writer in Connecticut.

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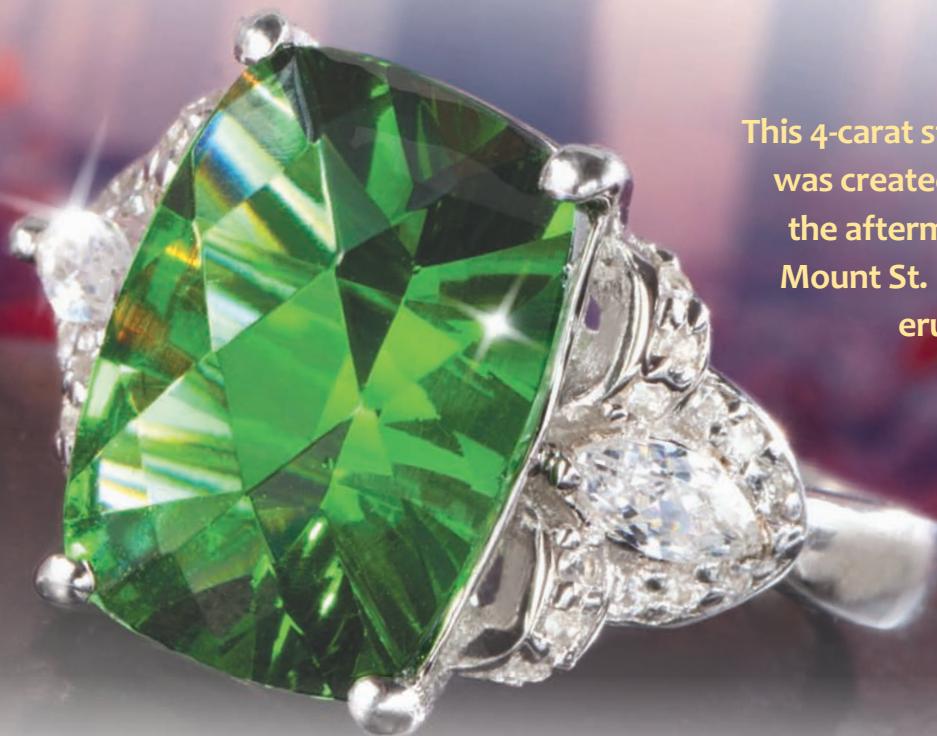


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Legion: No age cap on unemployability

BY TOM PHILPOTT

Until December 2012, VA routinely verified, using IRS tax records, what veterans drawing the Individual Unemployability (IU) benefit reported they earned each year. Screenings were seen as important because eligibility can end if otherwise qualified disabled veterans have earnings that exceed federal poverty guidelines.

The paper-based income verification process stopped when VA began developing an encrypted computer portal with IRS and Social Security Administration data to allow electronic verification instead. But that portal still isn't operating, proof that VA suspended its income-verification process too soon.

At a hearing before the House Veterans' Affairs Committee in June, Bradley Flohr, a senior adviser on compensation for the Veterans Benefits Administration, couldn't explain why VBA stopped verifying the earnings of 330,000 IU veterans before it had a replacement operating. This verification gap and other glaring weaknesses in how the IU benefit is administered, as documented by a new Government Accountability Office (GAO) report, had VA promising to implement the audit team's recommendation for ensuring that future IU claim decisions are more "well-supported."

It also had Congress giving the benefit fresh scrutiny and weighing more sweeping changes, including an age ceiling of 65 on eligibility for new applicants. That's an idea that veterans service organizations, including The American Legion, vehemently oppose.

IU adds \$5 billion annually to VA disability compensation for veterans with disability ratings below 100 percent who are unable to work because of service-connected conditions. By qualifying for IU they receive compensation at the 100-percent level. An applicant must have at least one service-connected disability rated at least 60 percent, or two or more disabilities with a combined rating of 70 percent and at least one condition rated 40 percent. They must also be "unable to maintain substantially gainful employment" because of these disabilities.

The gain in compensation is substantial. A 60-percent disabled veteran with no dependents receives \$2,907 in IU benefits, versus \$1,059 if compensated based on rated disabilities alone.

Reforms under way include improved guidance for VA claim reviewers on determining benefit eligibility, and new quality assurance screens so

that IU claim decisions are more consistent across VA regional offices. VA also promises to have electronic verification operating by January and to study whether age limits, or requiring vocational assessment of claimants, are reasonable steps to tighten eligibility.

Committee chairman Rep. Jeff Miller, R-Fla., said the audit "raises the question of whether VA should consider age as a factor" in determining IU eligibility. GAO found that more than

180,000 IU beneficiaries by 2013 were at least 65, a 73-percent increase in that age cohort since 2009. Even more surprising, according to GAO, 408 veterans 90 and older began receiving IU benefits for the first time that year.

At the same hearing, Legion legislative director Ian de Planque made three arguments against reducing or eliminating IU benefits based on age. First, current law is clear that a veteran's age shouldn't be considered in eligibility for VA compensation, he said. Second, the rising age of veterans qualifying for IU reflects today's workforce, with the number of working Americans older than 65 having doubled over the past 30 years, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Finally, most U.S. workers can build retirement nest eggs over the course of their working lives to support them in old age. That isn't true for many veterans with service-connected ailments or injuries, de Planque said.

"There can be savings found in the Department of Veterans Affairs," he added. "But an earned benefit that a veteran is entitled to is never a waste of money."

Tom Philpott has been covering military personnel and veterans issues for more than 30 years.



Ian de Planque, The American Legion's legislative director, argues against reducing or eliminating VA's Individual Unemployability (IU) benefit based on age. Photo by Lucas Carter

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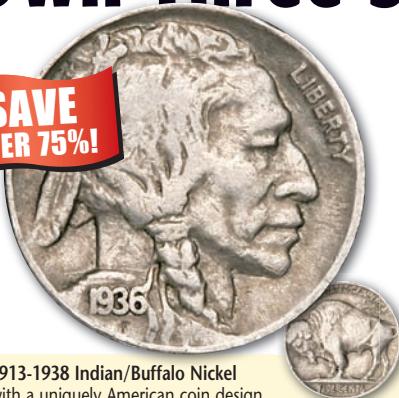
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New recruits take the oath of enlistment during a joint swearing-in ceremony at the Houston Rodeo in March. The seeds of the war they are now fighting were planted before many of them were born. U.S. Navy photo by Chris Falvey

That 1 Percent

An American Legion Magazine tribute to the post-9/11 generation of veterans and the war they still fight.

The youngest U.S. troops deployed today to fight the so-called Islamic State in Syria and Iraq were not yet kindergartners when their war began. They were learning to share, use their words, and respect others – especially those different from themselves. Today's soldiers were at day-care centers trying to color inside the lines, a decade before the first iPad appeared on the market and could do that for them. Our nation's future protectors would soon put 2 and 2 together and understand the chain of events that began on a sunny September morning in 2001 when Islamic extremists attacked the United States and changed the nature the world we all occupy. As they grew to adulthood, these young people would come to be defined in association to the date of the attacks, members of the most specific generation of Americans since the baby boom: the post-9/11 generation.

"We responded to a national tragedy," explains Christopher Wilkens, a Marine Corps veteran who fought in the Battle of Fallujah and now serves as

commander of American Legion Post 754 in New York City, about five miles from the memorial plaza where the World Trade Center attacks are remembered. "We all volunteered. We volunteered for a decade of war. We had options, and we chose this. Our vision is to show the world what we can do. We can kick ass. We can face anything. That's our vision going forward."

Regarded as the longest continuous war in U.S. history, the frontless global confrontation against terrorism continues to pit our nation's resolve against its budget. The war has fueled patriotism and protest alike. The attacks, and America's response to them, have topped the agendas of two presidents, seven sessions of Congress, the Pentagon and the Department of Veterans Affairs for nearly a decade and a half. The leaders of both enemy factions – Saddam Hussein and Osama bin Laden – were ultimately hunted down and killed by U.S. troops, but the war continues without the original enemy faces, a hydra that keeps growing new

heads. Today the enemy force is led by a former U.S. war prisoner, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, whose quest to reclaim hard-won gains in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere has sent America's fighting men and women back into the thick of harm's way.

This is the war that launched unmanned aerial drones. It is the war that was fought from control rooms, computers and satellites half a world away. It is a war that has not unleashed U.S. nuclear superiority, as many might have expected or feared, but turned cellphone-detonated roadside bombs into the leading killer of troops. It is the war that more than doubled battlefield survivability, and it is the war that made Facebook and Twitter viable sources for intelligence-gathering.

The war's critics openly question whether or not it can ever be won. It certainly won't end with anything like the Armistice of Compiègne or Instrument of Surrender on USS *Missouri*. President George W. Bush told The American Legion National Convention in 2004, however, that a successful conclusion to the war can be achieved if the United States keeps taking the fight to the enemy. "We meet today at a time of war for our country, a war we did not start, yet one that we will win," he said. "Make no mistake about it. We are winning, and we will win. We will win by staying on the offensive. We will win by spreading liberty."

Eleven years after that speech, we continue to fight, having successfully prevented sequels to 9/11 from happening on U.S. soil, an underappreciated accomplishment at a time when nuclear warheads can be stowed in carry-on luggage. As for the spread of liberty, Afghanistan and Iraq have struggled to become independent, free and capable of their own security, while neighboring states have erupted in civil wars and revolutions that leave the region as unstable as ever, the breeding ground for ISIS, and cause for continued U.S. resolve. With or without enough troops, hamstrung by a federal deficit quantified in the hundreds of billions, the post-9/11 generation of U.S. military men and women battles on, envisioning a world free from a scourge that has unnerved the West since Palestinian militants killed 11 members of the Israeli Olympic team in Munich in 1972.

Hit-and-run acts of terrorism and anti-Western violence – from the 1979 hostage crisis in Iran to Hezbollah's deadly 1983 attack on a U.S. Marine barracks in Beirut, to the first terror strike on New York's World Trade Center in 1993 that killed six

and injured more than 1,000 – began filling newspapers and leading television news broadcasts with jarring regularity as the years rolled by. This was all foreshadowing.

In 1998, Osama bin Laden's declaration of war against the West, specifically the United States, put a face on the enemy. On May 2, 2011, Navy SEAL Team Six raided the al-Qaida leader's compound in Pakistan and removed that face from the equation.

"I wish there was not a war, and I wish our young people did not have to fight and die," said

Col. Brett Wyrick, an Air National Guard surgeon, during his deployment to Iraq, as quoted in a publication printed after Resolution 169 was passed by the 87th American Legion National

Convention in Honolulu in 2005. "But I cannot wish away evil men ... These men are not wayward children who have gone astray. They are not great men who are simply misunderstood. They are cold-blooded killers, and they will kill you, me and everyone we love and hold dear if we do not kill them first." The 2005 resolution would state for the record The American Legion's support for the troops *and* their mission to rid the world of terrorism and terrorist-supporting regimes.

Soon into the war, America's wounded started coming home. Survivability had so greatly improved by advances in battlefield medicine that VA coined a new term for the kind of long-term care survivors would need: polytrauma. Head injuries, mental health, amputations, burns, blindness and multiple other conditions are treated comprehensively in a network of VA polytrauma centers that also address education, career training and family support. This approach has proven effective and logical, where it can be provided on a timely basis.

Five years of VA health care, regardless of income or disability rating, is offered to post-9/11 veterans in thanks for their sacrifice, but only if they can get in. By 2003, VA was overwhelmed with patient demand; more than 300,000 veterans were waiting 30 days or longer for medical appointments nationwide. VA's health-care system – already overflowing with veterans of past war eras – was clearly not prepared for the new wave, about a third of whom were suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, and more than 230,000 of whom had sustained traumatic brain injuries, often as the result of roadside-bomb blasts. PTSD and TBI would become known as the signature wounds of the war. They would also be blamed for high suicide rates.

OUR WAR

A SPECIAL REPORT THE POST-9/11 VETERAN

On March 31, 2011, a 28-year-old former combat Marine named Clay Hunt took his own life after months of battling PTSD, frustrated over treatment and prescription delays at VA. "He told me, 'It's like a bad movie on rewind,'" said Hunt's mother, Susan Selke. "It plays, it rewinds, plays, rewinds.' The medications he took didn't help." Five weeks after his suicide, VA informed the family that Hunt's service-connected disability rating had increased from 30 percent to 100 percent.

Four years later, Congress passed the Clay Hunt Suicide Prevention for American Veterans Act mandating improvements, including peer support, community outreach and greater caregiver accountability for veterans struggling with psychological conditions caused by their wartime service.

Greater attention to PTSD, TBI and military sexual trauma continues to evolve as the post-9/11 generation transitions back to civilian life. Mental health is just one concern among the many needs today's veterans face in the readjustment process. Education, career training, benefits assistance, personal finance and basic camaraderie with those who understand them are layered into the strata of the post-9/11 veteran who, unlike those who served in previous major war eras, represents less than 1 percent of the total U.S. population.

Out of this war came the Post-9/11 GI Bill, a long-overdue update to one of The American Legion's greatest accomplishments, the Service-

men's Readjustment Act of 1944 that educated millions and fueled a half-century of economic prosperity. Speaking at the 2011 American Legion National Convention in Minneapolis, President Obama said the newest generation of veterans could do as those of the past did for the slumping U.S. economy. "After a decade of war, it's time to focus on nation building here at home," Obama said. "And our veterans, especially our 9/11-generation veterans, have the skills and the dedication to help lead the way."

The motto retired Army Staff Sgt. Travis Mills posts on his website is simple: "Never give up. Never quit."

Mills lost both arms and both legs in a roadside bomb attack in Afghanistan in 2012. It was his third combat deployment. One of only five post-9/11 veterans who are quadruple amputees among nearly 1,600 who have lost limbs in the war, he has since dedicated his life to inspiring others and helping his fellow wounded warriors make the transition. In March 2015, his foundation purchased a lodge and property in Maine that he is turning into a retreat for disabled veterans and their families. "I'm fortunate," Mills told the *Bangor Daily News* in 2013. "I've got a 21-month-old daughter, and I've got a beautiful wife who loves me and is by my side. I still have the opportunity to have more children and live a good life."

Dawn Halfaker was a military police captain

The war on terrorism

Terrorism – if defined as acts of violence against unsuspecting civilians to instill fear and advance political, criminal or religious motives – can be traced to the 1st century A.D., or earlier. As a term of recent human warfare, the French Revolution's "reign of terror" in the late 18th century may be considered the seed of modern terrorism, due to the availability and use of explosives (as well as guillotines) to publicly display deadly violence.

Iran's Islamic Revolution in 1979, when 52 U.S. hostages were held captive in Tehran for 444 days, is often cited as the inspiration for the terror groups that ultimately became America's adversaries in the global war on terrorism. The hostage crisis was followed by a chronology of terror acts against U.S. civilians and military personnel that came to a massive crescendo on Sept. 11, 2001.



U.S. Marine Corps photo

Oct. 23, 1983

Beirut barracks bombing

Suicide truck bombers attack separate buildings housing U.S. and French military forces. Killed are 220 Marines, 18 sailors and three soldiers – the deadliest single-day death toll for the U.S. military since the first day of the Vietnam War's Tet Offensive.

Aug. 2, 1990–March 3, 1991 Gulf War

Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm send the U.S. military to the Middle East following Iraq's invasion and attempt to annex Kuwait. Iraq President Saddam Hussein fails to meet U.N. and Arab League deadlines to withdraw by Jan. 15, 1991. A coalition of 34 nations joins about 540,000 U.S. troops to swiftly remove Iraq forces from Kuwait. Hostilities end in a cease-fire agreement signed by both sides.



Wikimedia

AMERICA REMEMBERS PRESENTS

THE VIETNAM TRIBUTE TO VALOR PISTOL



HONORING ALL THOSE WHO SERVED IN VIETNAM

Nothing about the Vietnam War was easy. Those who were there remember the swampy grasslands, rice paddies, dense jungles, the heat and an elusive enemy; a war that took place halfway around the world in a country divided by decades of bitter history. They came from all over the country, from all walks of life, to fight for freedom on the other side of the world. They answered this call of duty with valor, courage, honor and commitment. America's involvement in Vietnam spanned many years, far longer than most wars. As a nation we owe all of our Vietnam Veterans a debt that can never be repaid.

As the United States officially marks its observance of the 50th Anniversary of the Vietnam War, we are proud to honor those who answered the call to duty. We can never repay the brave warriors who lost their lives and those who are still listed as missing in action. However, as Americans, we can come together to salute an entire generation of soldiers who sacrificed and served with honor and courage.

Now, to honor all those who served in the Vietnam War, America Remembers is proud to introduce the **Vietnam Tribute to Valor Pistol**. Issued in an exclusive edition limit, this handsome firearm captures the courage and sacrifice of all those who fought for freedom in Vietnam. Craftsmen who designed this Tribute went all out to provide a finish unlike any previous design. Once you hold the pistol in your hands you'll be amazed at the depth of the artwork, including fine elegant scrollwork and the remarkable punch-dot background.

A GRATEFUL NATION REMEMBERS ALL THOSE WHO SERVED

For this historic Tribute, America Remembers selected a working Colt® Government Model® .45 caliber pistol. Born for a combat role, the Colt .45 was the classic military firearm of the 20th century, a favorite sidearm of America's military from World War I through Vietnam. Craftsmen

commissioned specifically for this project by America Remembers decorate each pistol in sparkling 24-karat gold artwork with blackened patinaed highlights.

HONOR VIETNAM VETERANS WITH THIS EXCLUSIVE OFFER

Reservations will be accepted in the order they are received. Only 1,000 of the Vietnam Tribute to Valor Pistols will ever be produced. To be sure of acquiring the Tribute before the edition is fully subscribed, please place your reservation promptly. We will arrange delivery through the licensed firearms dealer of your choice. If for any reason you are not completely satisfied with your Tribute, you may return it in original, unfired condition within 30 days for a complete and courteous refund.

All the brave Americans who served with valor in Vietnam deserve an honored place in America's history. When the nation called, they answered. Few generations have faced a more daunting challenge than those who fought in Southeast Asia. They didn't hesitate to put their lives on the line and give everything in defense of freedom.

Whether you are a veteran who answered the call to duty, or you wish to honor your father, husband, brother or other family member or friend, the Vietnam Tribute to Valor Tribute Pistol is sure to become a cherished addition to your collection.



Extending gracefully across each side of the slide is an elaborately detailed Asian dragon, an important symbol representing the prosperity, power and nobility of the nation. This art serves as a banner on both sides. On the left it reads, "Vietnam Tribute to Valor," and on the right, "In Lasting Memory of Unequalled Courage," featured in a stylized bamboo text. Bamboo and dragons are so associated with Vietnam that both were prominently featured on the Vietnam Service Medal, awarded to members of the Armed Forces who served in Vietnam.

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NEXT MONTH THE HOMECOMING

"Our War: The Post-9/11 Veteran" series continues in the words, images and perspectives of the men and women who came home to an America they fought to protect.

serving in Iraq when a rocket-propelled grenade took her right arm. The former Army basketball player and current member of The American Legion Small Business Task Force is the founder and CEO of Halfaker & Associates, a successful Washington-based firm that provides high-tech communications and cybersecurity systems for the federal government, including U.S. military branches and the Department of Homeland Security. "I would not say I am naturally an entrepreneur," Halfaker told *The American Legion Magazine* in 2008. "I'd say I am naturally someone who just wants to carry on and endure."

And, like many of her fellow post-9/11-generation entrepreneurs, she is committed to hiring others who fought for their country. "Specifically, we are hiring wounded veterans," she said. "That's a mission very near and dear to my heart." In May 2015, *Inc.* magazine recognized her and her company, which now employs more than 130 people with annual revenues of approximately \$25 million, as one of the five top veteran-owned companies in the nation.

When former U.S. Sen. Jim Webb of Virginia received the Legion's Distinguished Public Service

Award in 2013 for authoring the Post-9/11 GI Bill, the highly decorated Vietnam War combat Marine described today's newest veterans as "the next greatest generation."

Obama described them this way to the Legion in Minneapolis: "A generation of innovators, they've changed the way America fights and wins its wars. Raised in the age of the Internet, they've harnessed new technologies on the battlefield. They've learned the cultures, traditions and languages of the places they've served. Trained to fight, they've taken on the role of diplomats, mayors and development experts, negotiating with tribal sheikhs, working with village shuras and partnering with communities. Young captains, sergeants and lieutenants have assumed responsibilities once reserved for more senior commanders, reminding us that in an era when so many other institutions have shirked their obligations, the men and women of the United States military welcome responsibility. Never before has our nation asked so much of our all-volunteer force – that 1 percent of Americans who wears the uniform."

This is the first in an *American Legion Magazine* series that will explore, in the words of that 1 percent, what this longest U.S. war has meant to them and the common bond they share with all who have served in the U.S. Armed Forces. ¶

— Jeff Stoffer



Corbis

Feb. 26, 1993

First World Trade Center bombing

A truck bomb is detonated below the North Tower of the World Trade Center in New York City in a failed attempt to send it crashing into the South Tower and bring down both. Six are killed and more than 1,000 are injured.

August 1996 and February 1998

Al-Qaida's declarations of war

Fatwas (Islamic religious decrees) are released by Osama bin Laden, announcing al-Qaida's intentions.

"I say to our Muslim brothers across the world: your brothers in Saudi Arabia and Palestine are calling for your help and asking you to share with them in the jihad against the enemies of God, your enemies the Israelis and Americans."

Bin Laden's 1996 fatwa was titled "Declaration of War Against the Americans Occupying the Land of the Two Holy Places."

The 1998 fatwa includes additional jihad groups.

"The ruling to kill the Americans and their allies – civilians and military – is an individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible to do it."

Bin Laden's second fatwa, dated Feb. 23, 1998

Aug. 7, 1998

U.S. Embassy bombings

Coordinated attacks kill hundreds in simultaneous truck-bomb explosions at U.S. embassies in Tanzania and Kenya, bringing bin Laden, Ayman al-Zawahiri and al-Qaida to widespread public attention for the first time.

Oct. 12, 2000

USS Cole attacked

While harbored in the Yemeni port of Aden, the U.S. Navy guided-missile destroyer USS *Cole* is attacked by suicide bombers. Seventeen U.S. sailors are killed and 39 injured.



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United as one

Desk jockey at Camp Pendleton one night, at war with terror the next day.

BY MICHAEL HJELMSTAD

IT'S MY GENERATION'S DAY OF INFAMY. We all remember where we were on 9/11. I was a Marine stationed in the northernmost part of Camp Pendleton, Calif. I casually went to bed one night, and woke up the next morning at war with terror.

This was it. All the training, experience and anticipation were for this moment. And we weren't ready. We'd been so sure there was no way we could be hit at home, but here we were. No advanced tactics or superior weaponry imposed on us. Just brazen, effective terrorism.

The 24-hour news cycle dutifully played its role. I've never met an adult who can't describe the live coverage of the second plane hitting the World Trade Center tower. Selfishly, my concern was for the Pentagon; I had friends there but no time or way to reach them. We had to secure our own perimeter now that we knew it was a coordinated effort, and the chaos of wondering what was to come next has never left my mind. Shock turned to anger as I took my turn at a checkpoint where a young infantryman found it amusing to give this desk jockey

sergeant a refresher on how to best employ the machine gun pointing toward the southern California road that leads to my favorite local dive bar.

Everyone wanted to check in with friends and family. I was stationed at the base's Reserve Support Center, helping answer the phone that never stopped ringing. One call I took was from a World War II veteran who said his uniform still fit, and he still had his rifle, and he wondered where he should report. Many reservists simply showed up at the gate because they couldn't get through on the phone. Scared mothers wondered if I knew where their sons or daughters could be found, and my own dad helped free up the phone line by informing the rest of my family that Camp Pendleton was not in any immediate danger.

Americans stood together, ready to smoke out the enemy and shoot them on the run. There was a slight problem determining exactly who that enemy was, but it didn't keep us from wanting to flex our patriotic muscle. From the bravado of Marines on the ground to angry newscasters of either bias

reporting from Ground Zero, we were united as one in wanting to bring swift and absolute justice to whoever had the guts to disrupt the false sense of security we felt in the United States. Before that day, terrorism was something that happened in far-off lands, not something that could take the lives of Americans here at home.

Nearly 15 years later, most servicemembers will tell you they joined because of 9/11 and that they want to do their part to fight the global war on terror, or whatever it's called now. Every one of them has joined or re-enlisted in a time of war. So it's not a surprise to be sent to a combat zone. If you join today, you will participate in war at some capacity. That wasn't always the case.

I GREW UP in an Air Force town in North Dakota, taking up imaginary arms with neighborhood kids and pretending to fight the Russians in our backyards. Pop culture in the '80s glamorized war and camaraderie, and we worshipped the likes of Luke Skywalker, John Rambo and G.I. Joe. I had the best action-figure collection on my block. Movies filled the gap for a generation of warriors who didn't talk about their Vietnam experiences, for reasons I wouldn't understand until later.

After a year in college, I worked in Texas with my best friend from high school, but the home-improvement field wasn't as lucrative as we'd hoped. Travis joined the Navy. I joined the Marine

Corps. To me, there was no other service. Damn, those posters and commercials were cool! I could quote Gunnery Sgt. Hartman from "Full Metal Jacket" word for word, and I knew I wanted to be a combat correspondent just like Joker.

When I signed up with a recruiter, Public Affairs (journalism) was clearly my first job choice. But because of the needs of the Marine Corps, and some very fine print the recruiter neglected to reveal, I spent my first four years on active duty as a radio operator in the communications field. Looking back, I'm glad I got that foundation, but gaining life experience is not something you appreciate while young. I tried to move into Public Affairs every year but was denied each time. When it came time to re-enlist, the career counselor told me I could only enlist in communications because the Marine Corps really needed another radio operator. So I got out and joined the Marine Corps Reserve, where I found a program that allowed me to apply for long-term orders of my choice. I quickly learned the system and finally fulfilled my childhood dream of becoming a combat correspondent.

I spent the next few years performing the extremely easy task of making Marines look good. Public Affairs, for me, ranged from print journalism for base newspapers before the Internet was really a thing, to online broadcast journalism, escorting media, and working for the Marine Corps Motion Picture & TV Liaison Office to

"It is possible to turn to biological attack, where a small can, not bigger than the size of a hand, can be used to release viruses that affect everything."

Iraq President Saddam Hussein, quoted in the state-controlled newspaper *Babil* on Sept. 20, 2001, after declaring that the 9/11 attacks were "God's punishment" against the United States



"Any nation that continues to harbor or support terrorism will be regarded by the United States as a hostile regime."

President George W. Bush, September 2001

Sept. 11, 2001 The 9/11 attacks

Al-Qaida operatives hijack four passenger airliners to crash into populated buildings in New York and Washington. Two of the planes, shockingly, bring down the North and South Towers of the World Trade Center in New York City. A third slams into the Pentagon. The fourth plane, intended for Washington, goes down in a rural Pennsylvania field after its passengers heroically fight the hijackers while airborne. Nearly 3,000 people of multiple nations are killed on 9/11, the deadliest foreign attack in U.S. history.

Sept. 14, 2001 Operation Noble Eagle

Operation Noble Eagle mobilizes thousands of National Guard and reserve personnel to provide security to military installations, airports, and other potential U.S. targets, such as bridges, power plants and ports. Congress authorizes the president to use "all necessary and appropriate force against those nations, organizations or persons he determines planned, authorized, committed or aided the terrorist attacks that occurred on Sept. 11, 2001, or harbored such organizations or persons."



Michael Hjelmstad, highlighted at upper right, with Hotel Company, 2nd Squad, 2nd Platoon at Camp Pendleton in 1994.

ensure an accurate portrayal of Marines in the entertainment industry.

At war, I began to realize that I was running the full spectrum of the Marine Corps. As I slept in the corner of an abandoned school compound with a few other Marines in Fallujah, where we had been ordered to train Iraqi soldiers we didn't trust to fight an enemy we couldn't identify, it dawned on me how far I had come. I rested with my rifle loaded and chuckled. I'd dreamed of being a Marine sergeant and a combat correspondent. Neither was anything like I'd imagined.

THE MARINE CORPS Communication-Electronics School is in Twentynine Palms, Calif., a perfect place to train Marines for the rigors of a war in a terrible climate. The heroes of Desert Storm were our instructors, and we gathered at their feet for the wisdom of real combat Marines – a rarity during my first several years in the Corps.

My class was among the first to allow women into the communications field, and to say the Marines on the ground had a difficult time adjusting is an understatement. I remember an old-school staff sergeant grumbling about how absurd he thought it was for women to even wear camouflage because they don't go into combat anyway. How times have changed.

In the early '90s, female Marines were still finding their place in the gun club, and there was some learning to be done both for them and for the good ol' boys. There was a certain amount of animosity toward women because the physical expectations for them were lower: only a mile-and-a-half run and no pull-ups, just a flexed arm hang.

Back then, I wasn't thrilled about women getting expanded roles in combat-related specialties like communications. Another old-school staff sergeant had me convinced that it was dangerous to have women anywhere near a combat zone. For example, we had to carry a heavy radio and set up big antennae. Could women even do that?

Sept. 16, 2001

War on terrorism

After witnessing the collapse of one of the towers of the World Trade Center, NBC broadcaster Tom Brokaw announces, "Terrorists have declared war on America." Four days later, President George W. Bush uses the phrase "war on terrorism" in an unscripted comment.



Oct. 7, 2001

Operation Enduring Freedom

The Taliban in Afghanistan declines President Bush's petition to extradite Osama bin Laden and ignores demands to shut down terrorist bases. Operation Enduring Freedom begins with a mix of strikes from land-based bombers and carrier-based fighters, along with missiles from U.S. and British ships. Destruction of terrorist infrastructure is a key objective.



December 2001

U.S. Special Operations units are deployed to the caves of Tora Bora near the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. They secure the area and search for bin Laden, who cannot be found. He is believed to have been in the caves shortly before fleeing into Pakistan, where he remained until he was killed nearly a decade later.

Oct. 26, 2001 USA Patriot Act

Congress passes legislation revising the nation's surveillance laws to greatly expand the government's authority to spy on citizens and terror suspects, while reducing checks and balances like judicial oversight and public accountability.

More important, if I was injured in combat, could the Marine next to me carry me out? There was also the idea that when a woman is in a dangerous situation, the men around her try to protect her rather than focus on the mission at hand – sort of a big-brother syndrome. And what would happen if a woman were captured? The scenario seemed absurd at the time, but the experiences of Jessica Lynch proved that reality to the point the military was willing to deny it.

Over the next decade, my opinion of women in the military changed dramatically. It was shaped not only by the young women with whom I served but by Marines like Sgt. Maj. Sylvia Walters, the senior enlisted Marine at El Toro, who broke barriers long before we ever donned the uniform.

Women's roles in today's military are far better defined by the things they have proven they can do. I know many great Marines who happen to be women, as well as some less-than-stellar ones; they are truly just like their male counterparts. In 2006, Maj. Megan McClung proved that roadside bombs are not sexist in any way. While deployed with I Marine Expeditionary Force, she was the head of Public Affairs for Al Anbar province and was escorting journalists into Ramadi when an improvised explosive device destroyed the Humvee, killing her and two other occupants. She was the first female Marine officer killed in the Iraq war.

In 2008, I deployed to Camp Fallujah, Iraq. I worked nights and usually ate alone in the nearly abandoned chow hall while I watched the news broadcast its version of what was going on. One night I joined a group of Marines in late-night dining: Sgt. Glen Martinez, Cpl. James Kimple, Cpl. Miguel Guzman and Cpl. Casey Casanova. They joked and had fun as Marines do, but at the same time were quite professional. I talked with Casanova specifically about her experience as a radio operator, remembering how difficult it had once been for women to be accepted into the field. Her team assured me that she was quite capable of her job and then made jokes about my age.

That night, my job of embedding media throughout Al Anbar province was delayed by a communications shutdown, the procedure to ensure proper notification of the families after Marines have been killed in action. With a heavy heart, I informed the casualty assistance officers about the deaths of four Marines I'd joked with over dinner a few hours before. They represented a perfect cross section of the diversity that is today's Marine Corps. They inspire me to this day.

During my time in the military, before and after 9/11, I made friends of every color and creed. The best thing about my service, really, was the opportunity to meet so many great people I would have never crossed paths with otherwise.

"The angel of death is raining destruction, so surrender now."

U.S. Air Force Maj. Allison Black, an AC-130H Spectre navigator, became known to insurgents in Afghanistan as "the angel of death" after her commanding general radioed to

the ground that American women were coming to thwart al-Qaida. Black, who enlisted in the Air Force at 18, is the first woman to receive the Air Force Combat Action Medal.

In 2011, she described her experience at The American Legion Washington Conference. "The AC-130 gunship is designed to put bullets where bombs can't go," she said. "It also uses a high-powered laser pointer that assists with target identification." As the AC-130 crew

unloaded 400 40-millimeter rounds and 100 105-millimeter rounds onto the enemy in the targeted area, a Northern Alliance general working with a U.S. team on the ground saw the gunship's laser and asked the team, "Is that a death ray?"

Ground team members reportedly replied, "As a matter of fact, it is."



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Camaraderie begins at boot camp, where it's instilled in you that you help each other in order to survive. At my first duty station, Marine Corps Air Station El Toro, my best friends were a Mexican named Eddie from California, a black named Al from Alabama, an Indian we called "Wolf" from New York and a white boy named Bill from Wyoming. Others would label them a Hispanic, African American, Native American and Caucasian, but political correctness doesn't represent my friends or the pre-9/11 Marine Corps. We were just ourselves. We were taught that all Marines serve the same Corps, whether we are light green, dark green or something in between.

The military, the Marine Corps in particular, expunges our individuality, but not entirely. We still have our own paths, and this is no different after service. But as veterans, we are often put into categories. We are known as "post-9/11 veterans."

I have close friends who are like family at my local American Legion post. They include veterans of OIF and OEF as well as those who served in World War II. And the better we get to know each other, the more we learn how much we are alike.

The media frequently misrepresents the military in support of its own agenda of either flavor. The military misrepresents itself for reasons beyond my understanding. I'm disappointed in its current lack of leadership, how those in charge are afraid of standing up for their own. But I am as proud of

our troops in general as I could ever be. Anyone who has ever strapped boots on their feet and done their part to support the greatest nation on earth are my brothers and sisters in arms, and I love every one of them.

Transition assistance and PTSD have become catchphrases for the seemingly ubiquitous organizations with top-level do-gooders having left their career missions to rescue veterans they have labeled as broken. That's not me. Nor is it the majority of post-9/11 veterans I know.

I appreciate today's patriotic sentiment, and I'm grateful that the generation of warriors before us – those who fought in Vietnam – made damn sure that what happened to them doesn't happen to us.

These days, Americans can separate their disgust of bad politics from their appreciation of servicemembers. That's a sign of growth and maturity. Sometimes, I wonder if the pendulum might have swung a little too far the other way, as veterans who come home badly damaged from war can be exploited to advance marketing interests. While some did come home changed by war, even permanently damaged in certain cases, the fact is that we are far from broken. ☮

Michael Hjelmstad is a former public affairs and new media chief for the U.S. Marine Corps, and a member of American Legion Post 43 in Hollywood, Calif.

Jan. 11, 2002

Welcome to Gitmo

The first detainees in the war arrive at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. The purpose of the facility under the administration of Joint Task Force Guantanamo is to detain dangerous combatants, interrogate and prosecute them. Since the facility opened, nearly 800 people have been held there, stirring global debate about the differences between prisoners of war and illegal combatant detainees and how their interrogations can be conducted while in custody. More than 600 detainees have been released since 2002, and more than 100 remain there.



"I understand that in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, with the traumas that had taken place, why, for a lot of Americans, the notion was somehow that we had to create a special facility like Guantanamo, and we couldn't handle this in a normal, conventional fashion. I understand that reaction. But we're now over a decade out. We should be wiser. We should have more experience in how we prosecute terrorists."

President Barack Obama in an April 30, 2013, press briefing, four years after he vowed to close the detention facility at Guantanamo Bay within a year. Both the Obama and Bush administrations encountered numerous difficulties in bringing an end to the camp, amid congressional resistance about transferring detainees to the United States and a lack of willing takers in the international community.

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Lights of Liberty



NYPD sergeant, veteran of Iraq and Afghanistan, is guided by the reasons we went to war and steps required to secure the peace.

BY WILEM S. WONG

"In the long history of the world, only a few generations have been granted the role of defending freedom in its hour of maximum danger. I do not shrink from this responsibility – I welcome it. I do not believe that any of us would exchange places with any other people or any other generation. The energy, the faith, the devotion which we bring to this endeavor will light our country and all who serve it – and the glow from that fire can truly light the world."

President John F. Kennedy,
inaugural address, Jan. 20, 1961

In the darkest hour, when despair was evident and hope was just a word, what endured was the beacon of light emanating from the torch of Lady Liberty. The 14 years that have passed since Sept. 11, 2001, have not diminished the memory of our loved ones killed at the World Trade Center, the Pentagon and the field near Shanksville, Pa.

The global war on terrorism is recognized as beginning on Oct. 7, 2001. Its approaching anniversary has not reduced the brilliance of our service-members killed in action, others maimed, and those suffering from traumatic brain injury or post-traumatic stress disorder. Each is a light of liberty.

The collective efforts of the U.S. military and civilian forces in Iraq and Afghanistan – people with whom I have had the honor to serve – have been dedicated to all the lights of liberty who lost their lives on 9/11, and to all who stepped forward on their behalf.



We read the news, watch television reports and listen to radio broadcasts about the progress of the global war on terrorism in Iraq and Afghanistan. But is winning the same as securing the peace?

Most Americans are aware of the shooting part of the war – or in current military jargon, the “kinetic” aspect. The “non-kinetic” part employs other military assets – including, but not limited to, civil affairs, combat engineers, uniformed medical personnel, and agriculture development and human terrain teams to engage the local populace as well as restore civil institutions and build or rebuild infrastructure in their societies. Kinetic measures are usually necessary only so that personnel employing non-kinetic efforts may safely travel throughout the battle space.

Non-kinetic warfare The U.S. military is engaged in many non-kinetic efforts. Iraq and Afghanistan are proud agrarian societies, but the continuous conflicts of recent decades have destroyed untold acres of farmland there. Moreover, generations of acquired agricultural knowledge have been lost.

Military assets working with the Department of State, the Department of Agriculture and USAID

The views expressed here are those of the author and not of the U.S. Army, U.S. Marine Corps, New York City Police Department or his previous affiliations.

through the nations’ ministries of agriculture have made progress in restoring Iraq’s and Afghanistan’s agrarian legacies. This progress is difficult to quantify and can therefore be seen as less tangible than kinetic action, but that does not diminish the significant long-term effect in securing the peace.

Civil Affairs (CA) is a major contributor to non-kinetic efforts. These personnel assist military commanders and government officials by coordinating efforts with civil authorities and the populace to reduce the impact of military operations during times of conflict and natural disasters. CA assists in programs and projects related to economic development, education, governance, infrastructure, public health, rule of law and security through coordination with the host country and U.S. government agencies. In addition, CA may partner with international intergovernmental (the United Nations) or nongovernmental organizations (Red Cross/Red Crescent, Mercy Corps or International Medical Corps).

Examples of two CA non-kinetic efforts to secure the peace include:

■ **Iraqi provincial elections, 2009** The Iraqi provincial election joint planning team included Iraqi nationals, civilians from nongovernmental organizations and coalition forces. The team was part of a larger coordination effort with Iraq’s Independent Higher Electoral Commission, international (intergovernmental) organizations and the State Department to ensure that Iraqi voters were offered fair and credible provincial elections across the country. The disenfranchised Sunni minority was encouraged to participate, resulting in a higher voter turnout than previous elections. This was a good sign that the Sunnis believed the political process was a peaceful avenue to share power and govern Iraq. Provincial elections were conducted Jan. 31, 2009, with a high turnout and results recognized by the Iraqi people.

■ **Iraqi National Literacy Campaign** The Iraqi National Literacy Campaign Committee included Iraqi nationals, civilians from nongovernmental organizations and coalition forces. This joint planning effort has offered the Iraqis a path to literacy proficiency, which has been a gateway for military-age males to serve in the Iraqi army or police. The campaign has also assisted others in gaining eligibility to enroll for vocational training that leads to better employment opportunities.

Moreover, a literate populace may be better able to resist insurgent propaganda. Ultimately, the campaign will increase the literacy rate of the Iraqis, which will appeal to foreign investors. Increased economic opportunities for Iraqis can also dissuade military-age males from accepting the financial incentives offered by the insurgency.

Another contributor to non-kinetic efforts is the Human Terrain Team (HTT), which directly engages local communities through face-to-face interviews. The team learns perceptions, motivations, interests and grievances for or against their government, as well as public opinion about the coalition forces and the insurgents (i.e., the Taliban). HTT uses information from these interviews to provide operationally relevant, actionable information for military commanders and their staffs to better guide their decision-making.

Here are some examples of non-kinetic efforts to secure the peace in Afghanistan, using HTTs:

■ **Agro-economic mindset of agriculturalists.** This involves understanding farmers' economic mindset, particularly about specific crops they choose to plant and how this information can be used to better allocate resources from the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIRoA), USAID, USDA, nongovernmental organizations and the Department for International Development (DFID), the British equivalent of USAID.

The information can assist in blunting the poppy harvest on which the Taliban relies to fund its operations. Ultimately, the agricultural information fosters an environment conducive for farmers to sell fruits and vegetables to consumers in domestic and international markets, driving toward a sustainable economic environment.

■ **Interim Security Critical Infrastructure (ISCI)/Afghanistan Local Police (ALP).** ISCI and ALP are local nationals who conduct security patrols in the rural districts where they reside. Recruitment and retention are critical factors in both. These security forces are put to great use where Afghan security might be lacking. Intimate knowledge of ISCI/ALP members in their own communities usually leads to better police intelligence to disrupt Taliban or insurgent activities locally. In addition, this offers an available candidate pool for increasing the capacity of the Afghan National Security Forces, including army and police, to provide security.

■ **Religious Engagement Program.** This program operates in coordination with Navy chaplains to help Afghan National Army Religious Cultural Adviser Officers (RCAOs) engage local religious leaders to build positive relationships with their communities as well as to counteract Taliban and insurgents' anti-GIRoA and anti-coalition messages. Moreover, RCAOs' efforts may reduce Taliban/insurgent attacks against GIRoA and

Oct. 11, 2002

War in Iraq

Congress passes a bipartisan resolution authorizing military action in Iraq. Failure to comply with U.N. weapons inspections – a condition of the cease-fire against Iraq after Desert Storm, along with recognition that known al-Qaida members were harbored and aided in Iraq – are among the reasons specified. The resolution passes the Senate by a 77-23 vote and the House 296-133.



Oct. 12, 2002

Bali bombing

Terrorists linked to al-Qaida bomb a tourist district on the Indonesian island of Bali, killing 202 and injuring another 209.



U.S. Air Force photo

Nov. 26, 2002

Yemen drone attack

The CIA carries out a Predator drone strike in Yemen that kills six suspected members of Osama bin Laden's network – including Ali Qaed Senyan al-Harthy, who was linked to the attack on the October 2000 attack on USS Cole.

Nov. 25, 2002

Homeland Security Act

Congress passes the Homeland Security Act, formally creating the Department of Homeland Security as a stand-alone, Cabinet-level department to further coordinate and unify U.S. protection at home. The act leads to the transfer of the U.S. Coast Guard to the Department of Homeland Security.

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coalition forces, and increase cooperation between GIRoA/coalition forces and local communities. The goal is to sustain a positive and responsive relationship between GIRoA and the people.

■ **Street-Level Vision 2014.** This approach involves understanding local perceptions of the eventual withdrawal of coalition forces and its potential impact for Afghanistan. Such information can be used to determine the right kind of data necessary to measure success prior to coalition forces' withdrawal in a given area.

Life after bin Laden The relationship between the Taliban and Osama bin Laden is well known. President Obama's announcement of bin Laden's killing on May 1, 2011, was celebrated throughout the United States – particularly in New York City.

I was deeply moved, as a soldier and New York City Police Department officer, to be serving with the Marines in Afghanistan's Helmand province at the time of bin Laden's death. I felt a sense of closure for the NYPD (23 fallen), the New York City Fire Department (343 fallen), the Port Authority Police Department (37 fallen), the city itself and the nation. As the war on terrorism continues, we have taken out additional al-Qaida leaders, such as Anwar al-Awlaki.

The withdrawal of U.S. combat troops from Iraq and Afghanistan closed a chapter but opened new ones, of self-determination for the people of post-

Saddam Hussein Iraq and post-Taliban Afghanistan. As we enter the 14th year of the war, it may be difficult to visualize its conclusion.

Central to that conclusion is our ability to secure the peace. We are winning this long war with kinetic targeting, but we will not secure a lasting peace without non-kinetic efforts through better governance and sustainable development. The lack of such may be factors in the rise of the Islamic State (ISIS) and its control of territory in and around Iraq and Afghanistan.

Although it may get more difficult before it gets better in that region of the world, our fallen and their families are not forgotten.

Inspired by the words of President Kennedy, I believe that the price being paid, the burden being borne, the hardships being met through the service of U.S. military personnel around the world, and the vigilance of our nation's law enforcement officers remind us that the lights of liberty are eternal, just like the flame that marks JFK's memorial at Arlington National Cemetery. ¶

Wilem S. Wong has served more than 27 years in the Army Reserve. He is a veteran of Iraq and Afghanistan, now in the Selective Service System in New York. In the civilian world, he is an NYPD sergeant. He is a member of American Legion Post 1291 in New York City, which provided relief and support for first responders in the aftermath of 9/11.



Feb. 5, 2003
United Nations address
U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell addresses the U.N. Security Council and presents evidence

that Saddam Hussein's government in Iraq poses an immediate threat to the United States and its coalition allies. The presentation fails to change the position of the Security Council but succeeds in hardening the overall tone toward Iraq.

Feb. 15, 2003
Global antiwar protest
A protest is coordinated across the world, in more than 600 cities, expressing opposition to the imminent war in Iraq. The series of events is described as the largest protest movement in human history. The number of people taking part is estimated at up to 30 million.



March 20, 2003

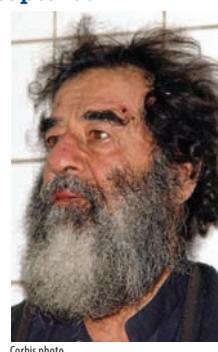
War in Iraq

The United States and coalition allies launch a "shock and awe" attack on Hussein's Iraqi forces. President George W. Bush refers to the invasion as the central front on the war on terror. The initial invasion consists of 21 days of combat operations executed by a combined force of troops from the United States (148,000), United Kingdom (45,000), Australia (2,000) and Poland (194).

"My name is Saddam Hussein. I am the president of Iraq, and I want to negotiate."
Saddam Hussein's words to U.S. troops, who captured him in a hole in the ground near Tikrit

Dec. 13, 2003
Saddam Hussein captured

Operation Red Dawn leads to the capture of the Iraqi president near Tikrit. U.S. soldiers discover him in a hole and turn him over to Iraqi custody with U.S. security, where he faces trial for multiple crimes.



Corbis photo

How to Outsmart a Millionaire

Only the "Robin Hood of Watchmakers" can steal the spotlight from a luxury legend for under \$200!

I wasn't looking for trouble. I sat in a café, sipping my espresso and enjoying the quiet. Then it got noisy. Mr. Bigshot rolled up in a roaring high-performance Italian sports car, dropping attitude like his \$14,000 watch made it okay for him to be rude. That's when I decided to roll up my sleeves and teach him a lesson.

"Nice watch," I said, pointing to his and holding up mine. He nodded like we belonged to the same club. We did, but he literally paid 100 times more for his membership. Bigshot bragged about his five-figure purchase, a luxury heavyweight from the titan of high-priced timepieces. I told him that mine was the **Stauer Corso, a 27-jewel automatic classic now available for only \$179.** And just like that, the man was at a loss for words.

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Battlefields of Terror

BY MARK SEAVEY



Unused ammunition lies on the ground in a cave previously used by al-Qaida fighters in Afghanistan's Tora Bora area. U.S. soldiers and officials searched the area for signs of Osama bin Laden but could not locate him. Photo by Chris Hondros/Getty Images

The caves of Tora Bora

The cave complex of Tora Bora in eastern Afghanistan is 31 miles from the Khyber Pass, which for centuries has been a vital pathway in and out of what is today known as Pakistan. More recently, it served as a strategic location for the Taliban and al-Qaida. As U.S. forces converged on the region early in the war, having intercepted radio communications indicating that Osama bin Laden was hiding in the complex.

In early December 2001, members of Operational Detachment Alpha (ODA) 572, 5th Special Forces Group, converged on the complex, along with CIA personnel and members of the Northern Alliance. For the first 72 hours, ODA 572 guided munitions on target, seemingly to little effect. The ODA team was later joined by an additional 70 special operators with Delta Force, Naval Special Warfare Development Group (commonly known as "SEAL Team Six") and members of the Air Force's Special Tactics Squadron. By Dec. 12, the enemy also faced British and German special forces, as well as nearly 2,000 fighters from the Northern Alliance.

Although the complex is not nearly as advanced as media accounts portrayed it, each cave had to be cleared of fighters one at a time. Afghans serving with coalition forces weren't always reliable, and rival Taliban troops appeared to be bartering for their own freedom as the mission progressed. As Gary Berntsen, CIA field commander at Tora Bora, described in his book "Jawbreaker: The Attack on Bin Laden and Al-Qaeda," there was hope that bin Laden's men might turn him in themselves. He recounts what one of the CIA men said in discussing the al-Qaida leader: "If [redacted] is willing to help us capture bin Laden, we'll do business with him and let him go. If he jerks us around, we'll take him prisoner."

"Dalton Fury" (a pseudonym for the Delta Force ground commander) believes that bin Laden was hiding in the cave complex at the time, noting in his bestselling book "Kill Bin Laden" that the last radio transmission intercept stated, "I'm sorry for getting you involved in this battle. If you can no longer resist, you may surrender with my blessing."

Gen. Tommy Franks was less certain, saying in 2004 that "we don't know to this day whether Mr. bin Laden was at Tora Bora in December 2001. Some intelligence sources said he was; others indicated he was in Pakistan at the time ... Tora Bora was teeming with Taliban and al-Qaida operatives ... but Mr. bin Laden was never within our grasp."

It is believed that bin Laden escaped Tora Bora by heading east over the 14,000-foot mountains and into Pakistan, where he found safe haven until his discovery nearly a decade later.



Army Special Forces soldiers conduct a horseback patrol in 2002, searching for al-Qaida and Taliban fugitives. The horses allowed them to patrol narrow streets or alleys as well as other difficult terrain.

Photo by Scott Nelson/Getty Images

The 21st century's first cavalry charge

Not even two months after 9/11, Mazar-e-Sharif was the first major city to be captured in the Afghanistan operation. Northern Alliance troops led by Gen. Abdul Rashid Dostum advanced rapidly until they were within 25 kilometers of the city, which is strategically located in northern Afghanistan near the borders of Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan.

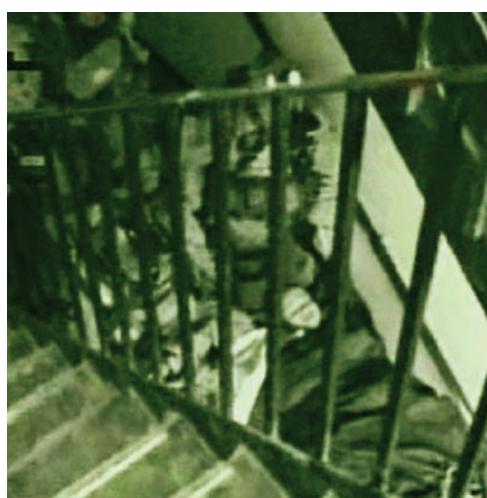
It was a classic Special Operations mission, marrying U.S. technological and air assets with an implacable group of fighters who were reported to have attacked tanks while mounted on Afghan horses. As one Special Forces team commander accompanying the Northern Alliance quipped, "It was like the Jetsons met the Flintstones." Many of the Green Berets who went into the city on horseback had never ridden horses before the war began.

Air power and ground tenacity proved too much for the Taliban, which retreated in disarray. Air Force Sgt. Stephen Tomat received a Silver Star for his actions on Nov. 10, 2001,

when he and his team entered Mazar-e-Sharif to strike an enemy stronghold of some 900 combatants. According to Tomat's citation, while under direct small-arms fire 380 meters from the enemy position, he "calmly highlighted the friendly location and called in close air support." His "expert control obliterated the enemy while keeping the friendly forces well inside of danger close safe from harm. The direct action mission resulted not only in the destruction of the enemy compound and over 800 Taliban personnel, but it also finalized the liberation of Mazar-e-Sharif."

In a report to Congress, then Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld called the battle for Mazar-e-Sharif "the first American cavalry charge of the 21st century."

The Northern Alliance lost 38 men, while the Americans suffered no loss of life. In addition to capturing the city, the combined force killed more than 300 Taliban fighters and captured around 500, while another 1,000 defected.



U.S. commandos carry Pfc. Jessica Lynch on a stretcher during her rescue from an Iraqi hospital in Nasiriyah, Iraq, on April 1, 2003. AP photo

The rescue of Pvt. Jessica Lynch

In the initial invasion of Iraq, one area of heavy resistance was Nasiriyah, about 225 miles southeast of Baghdad. On the morning of March 23, 2003, soldiers from the Army's 507th Maintenance Company mistakenly turned off the route at night and lost touch with the task force's larger combat units. They were ambushed, and despite a firefight that lasted nearly an hour, Iraqi forces overwhelmed the group. They killed 11 and captured several soldiers, including Spc. Shoshana Johnson and Pvt. Jessica Lynch. Both sustained injuries during the firefight but by all accounts were treated well during captivity in a hospital.

One of the doctors who treated Lynch walked nearly six miles to a Marine Corps vehicle checkpoint; acting on the intelligence he provided, U.S. forces devised a rescue plan.

On April 1, Marines and Navy SEALs staged a diversionary attack on nearby Iraqi irregulars, while Army Rangers, Air Force pararescuemen, and Special Forces and Delta Force operators launched a night raid on the hospital. They secured Lynch and the bodies of eight fallen U.S. troops. Johnson and six other prisoners were rescued during a house raid on April 13.

'Never just another battlefield'



Marines return fire during the First Battle of Fallujah in April 2004.

U.S. Marine Corps photo by Cpl. Matthew J. Apprendi

Fallujah: Two battles, two lessons

Combatants, First Battle of Fallujah

Coalition: 2,200 U.S. and Polish troops led by Gens. James Conway and James Mattis (*most U.S. units were with the 1st Marine Division*)

Insurgents: Roughly 3,500 led by Omar Hadid, whose forces included Ba'athists, al-Qaida in Iraq, Islamic Army of Iraq, Mujahideen and Chechen volunteers.

Combatants, Second Battle of Fallujah

Coalition: 10,500 U.S. troops, 2,000 Iraqi security forces and 850 British personnel, led by Gens. Richard Natonski, James Mattis and James Cowan

Insurgents: Roughly 4,000 Iraqis and al-Qaida in Iraq, led by Omar Hadid, Abdullah Shaddad and Hemin Saleem-Banishari (the latter two were killed in the battle)

By 2004, Fallujah had a reputation as one of the most dangerous areas in Iraq. U.S. patrols occasionally went through the city, but no all-out effort was made to control the situation until March 31 that year, after four contractors with the private military firm Blackwater were ambushed and killed. Their bodies were burned, dragged through the street and eventually hung from a bridge over the Euphrates River. Images from the atrocity were broadcast worldwide.

U.S. reaction was immediate and clear. "We will pacify that city," said Brig. Gen. Mark Kimmitt, deputy director of operations in Iraq.

On April 3, the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force received its initial operations orders. Nearly 2,000 U.S. Marines encircled the city by the next evening. As they prepared to attack the city, Navy Chaplain Wayne Hall blessed one of the units that would do the bulk of the fighting. "Today is Palm Sunday," Hall was quoted as saying in *The Atlantic*. "The day of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, where he broke the bounds of hell. Tonight commences your triumphal entry into Fallujah, a place in the bounds of hell. This is a spiritual battle, and you Marines are the tools of mercy."

Troops moved slowly into the city, retaking it street by street under intense fire from small groups of insurgents. Marine scout snipers positioned on roofs throughout the city engaged enemy snipers, some averaging 31 kills apiece, according to an embedded *Atlantic* reporter.

Political support from the Iraqi government diminished significantly due to a number of civilian casualties, which led to an eventual cease-fire in Fallujah, which was at least partially secured. U.S. troops suffered 27 deaths, while insurgent forces (Al-Qaida in Iraq, Ba'athists and Chechen volunteers) reportedly had between 180 and 230 killed.

The Iraqi government and military officials agreed on a plan to arm local militias that, it was believed, would fight aggressively against the extremists. However, shortly after U.S. weapons were transferred to these groups, it was discovered that the man selected to lead the militias had engaged in attacks on the Shi'ite minority population and was replaced. Within months, all the weapons provided to the militia to fight against al-Qaida and affiliated groups were in the hands of enemy forces.

Staff Sgt. Daniel Briggs and Master Sgt. Donald

Hollenbaugh received Distinguished Service Crosses for the First Battle for Fallujah. Sgt. Willie Copeland and Capt. Brent Morel received the Navy Cross, the latter posthumously.

By November, the situation had deteriorated to the point that nearly 14,000 troops were needed to pacify the city. "Operation Phantom Fury" featured Army, Marine and Navy personnel working side by side with British forces and Iraqi security troops. The number of enemy insurgents was estimated at around 4,000, in heavily fortified areas; the entire city was thought to be wired with explosives.

The invasion began the night of Nov. 7, 2004, with Special Forces and Iraqi commandos attacking from the west and the south, with numerous Marine Corps units. Meanwhile, Navy Seabees disabled all electricity going into the city. Other Marine and Army units attacked from the north.

Civilian casualties were not as much of an issue this time around, because nearly 90 percent of the civilian population had fled the city prior to the second battle. The 3rd Battalion, 5th Marines faced some of the most intense fighting, which one military official called "some of the heaviest urban combat U.S. Marines have been involved in since the Battle of Hué City in Vietnam in 1968."

By the time Phantom Fury ended Dec. 23, the 3/5 Marines had 19 killed in action and 245 wounded. Total casualties for coalition forces were 95 killed and 560 wounded Americans, eight killed and 43 wounded Iraqis, and four killed and 10 wounded British. Insurgents had between 1,200 and 1,500 killed with an additional 1,500 captured.

The Army's 2nd Battalion, 2nd Infantry Regiment was awarded the Presidential Unit Citation for actions during the battle. Operation Phantom Fury also yielded two nominees for the Medal of Honor. Sgt. Rafael Peralta of 1st Battalion, 3rd Marines eventually received the Navy Cross, and Staff Sgt. David Bellavia of the Army's Task Force 2-2 Infantry received the Silver Star and was nominated for the Medal of Honor. Marine 1st Sgt. Bradley Kasal, Staff Sgt. Aubrey McDade, Cpl. Jason Clairday, Sgt. Jarrett Kraft, Cpl. Jeremiah Workman, Lance Cpl. Christopher Adlessperger, Cpl. Robert Mitchell and Cpl. Dominic Esquibel received the Navy Cross. Clairday's award was presented posthumously.

Francis "Bing" West spent both battles embedded with various units, and came away with a strong distaste for the command's handling of them. "The singular lesson from Fallujah is clear," he concluded in his book "No True Glory." "When you send our soldiers into battle, let them finish the fight. Ordering the Marines to attack, then calling them off, then dithering, then sending them back in, constituted a flawed set of strategic decisions. American soldiers are not political bargaining chips. They fight for one another, for winning the battle, and for their country's cause."

Two years later, Bellavia returned to Iraq not as a soldier but as a journalist, placing flowers at the places where his friends had given their lives.

"The soil in Fallujah and all of Iraq has been consecrated with the blood of our dead," Bellavia recounted in "House to House," his best-selling book. "Fallujah will never be just another battlefield It was here we fought for hope. It was here that we fought to end the reign of terror that had descended on the innocents of the city."

Regime change: Saddam's era ends

On July 22, 2003, U.S. troops led by Special Forces Task Force 121 – including the Headquarters and Charlie companies of the 101st Airborne's 3/327th Infantry – cornered the sons of Saddam Hussein, Qusay and Uday, in a home in the northern Iraq city of Mosul.

In the "Most Wanted Deck of Cards" issued to identify high-value targets, Qusay was the ace of clubs and Uday was the ace of hearts. Acting on a tip from a cousin of the Husseins, Special Forces troops approached the house and came under fire. The operators pulled back, and over the next six hours attacked the building with TOW missiles, a Mark 19 belt-fed grenade launcher, .50 caliber machine guns and small arms.

After the firefight, U.S. forces recovered the bodies of the president's sons, as well as their bodyguard and Qusay's 14-year-old son, Mustapha. Meanwhile, Saddam went on the move to avoid capture by coalition forces; some intelligence indicated that he might be hiding in his hometown area of Tikrit, 100 miles north of Baghdad.

Maj. Gen. Ray Odierno turned over the operation to Col. James Hickey, who had members of Task Force 121 work with his troops in "Operation Red Dawn." On Dec. 13, 2003, the combined unit searched two purported hiding sites, "Wolverine 1" and "Wolverine 2," but failed to locate the deposed dictator. Troops continued searching the area, and finally an Iraqi-American interpreter named Samir located the "spider hole" in which Saddam was hiding with a 9mm pistol. He surrendered without a fight.

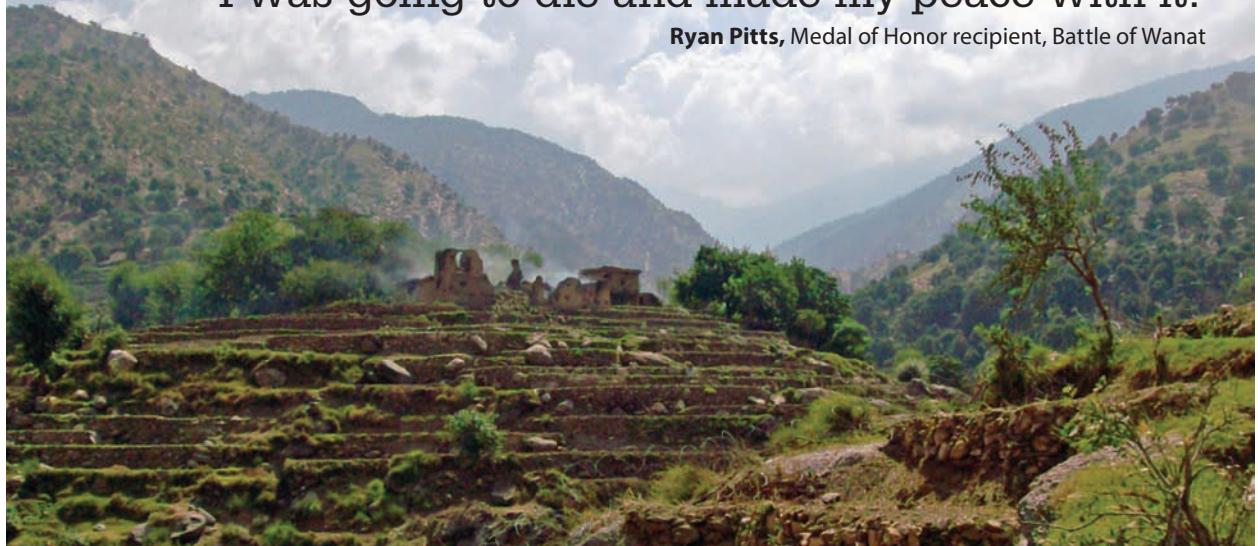
On Nov. 5, 2006, an Iraqi court convicted Saddam Hussein of crimes against humanity, including the murder of 148 residents of Dujail, Iraq, whom he had arrested, tortured and killed in 1982. On Dec. 30, he was hanged for his crimes.



U.S. soldiers look at the Styrofoam cover of the "spider hole" where Saddam Hussein hid before his capture in ad-Dawr near Tikrit, Iraq, Dec. 15, 2003. Photo by Chris Hondros/Getty Images

"I was going to die and made my peace with it."

Ryan Pitts, Medal of Honor recipient, Battle of Wanat



The view from the northern fighting position of Observation Post Topside, showing the dead space where the enemy attacked just below the terraces. The building in the distance was an enemy fighting position during the 2008 battle. DOD photo courtesy Staff Sgt. Ryan Pitts

Deadly defense at Wanat

Combatants

Coalition: 48 American and 24 Afghan soldiers from 2nd Platoon, Chosen Company, 2nd Battalion, 503rd Infantry Regiment (Airborne), 173rd Airborne Brigade Combat Team and affiliated Afghan National Army troops

Insurgents: 200 to 500 Taliban, al-Qaida and Hezb-i-Islami militants led by Sheikh Dost Mohammad

At about 4:20 a.m. July 13, 2008, a loose affiliation of anti-coalition forces attacked a small outpost near Wanat in the rugged Nuristan province of Afghanistan. Having just moved into the area a week earlier, defensive positions were not completed. Most of the vehicle patrol base and nearby observation point ("OP Topside") had some perimeter protection, but various setbacks, including a broken-down construction vehicle, impeded progress. A 4-foot-high wall of HESCO barriers (large sandbags) surrounded most of the outpost, while some of the perimeter was secured only with concertina wire laid across the ground.

The attackers had managed to approach the base from multiple directions and initiated contact with machine guns, rocket-propelled grenades and mortars. The assault knocked out a 120mm mortar and caused secondary explosions from ammunition stockpiled there, while rocket-propelled grenade fire destroyed a TOW missile.

At OP Topside, about 60 meters beyond the outpost perimeter, the situation was grim. A burst of machine-gun fire initiated contact, followed by an RPG round that hit the position and wounded or stunned everyone there. Spc. Matthew Phillips managed to toss one grenade before he was mortally wounded. Pfc. Tyler Stafford and Staff Sgt. Ryan Pitts were seriously wounded, and within the first 20

minutes, all nine men at the outpost were either killed or badly hurt. Insurgents then swarmed through a wire barrier that provided meager defense.

Because of its elevated position, Topside was critical to base protection. Losing it would have given the more numerous insurgents excellent firing positions. As President Barack Obama said at Pitts' Medal of Honor ceremony at the White House on July 21, 2014, "against that onslaught, one American held the line ... just 22 years old, nearly surrounded, bloodied but unbowed."

Wounded in both legs and with shrapnel in his arm, Pitts crawled onto the sandbags and fired a machine gun at the approaching insurgents. Alone and bleeding, the perimeter of his position breached, he could hear enemy voices as they closed in. He made a prediction about his fate: "I was going to die and made my peace with it."

Two U.S. soldiers, platoon leader 1st Lt. Jonathan P. Brostrom and Cpl. Jason Hovater, were killed trying to deliver ammunition to the observation post. A second relief group led by Sgt. Mike Denton finally made it to Topside, an act for which Denton was later awarded the Silver Star.

"That Mike Denton and the other guys basically decided that my life was worth risking their lives to come and try to save me, that's pretty amazing," Pitts recalled. "He saved my life. He was able to search his best friend Jason Hovater's dead body for ammo and tell him that he loved him and then moved back on to fight ... I don't know if I could have done that."

With support from Denton, Pitts called in air support. Over the ensuing three hours, the air above the outpost would swarm with Apaches, Predator drones, B-1B Lancers, A-10 close air-support planes and even F-15E Strike Eagles. Four hours after launching the attack, the anti-coalition forces withdrew, having sustained nearly 50 killed and another 40 wounded.

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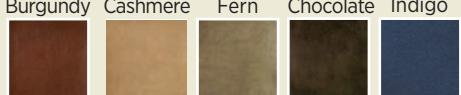
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Tucked in a river valley, COP Keating was vulnerable to attack. U.S. Army photo

COP Keating

Combatants

Coalition: 60 Americans, two Latvians, Afghan Nation Army elements, B Troop and 3-61 Cavalry Regiment.

Insurgents: Approximately 300 Taliban insurgents led by Sheikh Dost Mohammad

At dawn on Oct. 3, 2009, Taliban-led insurgents attacked Army Combat Outpost (COP) Keating in Afghanistan's Kamdesh Valley. Nestled in a river valley, the COP was home to about 60 cavalrymen from Bravo Troop, 3rd Squadron, 61st Cavalry Regiment, 4th Infantry Division. They confronted the enemy in a 12-hour close-contact battle that nearly went hand-to-hand. Security was breached in three places. Fires set by the attackers destroyed the COP's barracks. Close air support and mortar fire had to be directed at enemy forces inside the original perimeter.

In the first hour, the cavalrymen had consolidated in a tight perimeter, in the only two buildings not burning. From there, they began pushing out teams to regain control. They expanded the perimeter all the way back to the entry control point and to the buildings on the western edge of the outpost, which became their final fighting position.

Jon Hill, a platoon sergeant and Silver Star recipient, said he'll never forget Staff Sgt. Clint Romesha's attitude that day. "I was at my peak of frustration, fatigue, and overwhelmed at the situation at hand," Hill says. "In the tactical operations center, it was loud with explosions just outside, yelling, and new reports of enemy locations. Out of the blue, 'Ro' said in a very stern and demanding voice – just as there was a moment of odd but haunting silence – 'I'll tell you what we are going to do. We are going to take this f***ing COP back!'"

Staff Sgt. Ty Carter, meanwhile, had been wounded. Nevertheless, he continued firing at the enemy inside the perimeter, ran weapons and ammunition to positions under fire, and carried a wounded comrade 30 meters while rounds ripped the air around him.

Close air support coming on station changed the tide of the battle and forced an enemy retreat. Twelve hours after the battle started, the quick-reaction force that landed three kilometers away made it to the COP and relieved the besieged troops.

After the battle, COP Keating was abandoned and ultimately destroyed by U.S. aircraft called in to ensure that nothing was left that could be used by the insurgents. As the last helicopters full of troops loaded up to leave the area, Romesha was the final man onboard.

The Battle for COP Keating produced 27 Purple Hearts, 37 Army Commendation medals with "V" devices for valor, three Bronze Stars, 18 Bronze Stars with "V" devices and nine Silver Stars. Two cavalrymen, Romesha and Carter, received the Medal of Honor.

The enemy death toll is estimated at between 150 and 200.

The Battle for Marjah

In terms of troops involved, nothing in the Afghanistan war compares with the 10-month Battle for Marjah, which began in early 2010. A combined force of more than 15,000 American, Afghan, Canadian, Estonian, Danish, French and British troops fought to secure the area in the country's southwest corner, near both the Pakistan and Iran borders. Marjah had long been crucial to the Taliban for its abundant poppy fields, from which was made heroin to finance war efforts. The U.S. forces planned the battle well in advance and included numerous units. Marines from Camp Leatherneck made up the bulk of the American contingent.

Codenamed "Operation Moshtarak" – which means "together" in the local Dari language – the operation was the first for surge forces that had been filtering into theater since President Obama announced the initiative the previous December. Marines, Special Forces and coalition units took the city in about a week, engaging in heavy combat nearly the whole time. However, the Taliban stubbornly refused to give up Marjah and attacked with IEDs and small arms fire almost daily.

Four Marines received Silver Stars for their actions at Marjah: Sgt. Miguelange Madrigal, Capt. Timothy Sparks, Lance Cpl. Jeffrey Cole and Cpl. Jason Hassinger. Army Staff Sgt. Cory Calkins received the Army Distinguished Service Cross, while Marine Sgt. Joshua Moore received the Navy Cross. Marine Cpl. Kyle Carpenter received the Medal of Honor.

The nearly yearlong battle for Marjah cost 45 American and 13 British lives. Enemy casualties exceeded 120, and another 56 were captured.

An officer of the 1/3 Marine Weapons Company issues orders as Marines advance against Taliban forces northeast of Marjah.

AFP/Getty photo by Patric Baz





Sgt. 1st Class Benjamin Perez escorts a detainee captured by the Iraqi army for further processing in 2005. DOD photo

War and Detention

Today's state-oblivious battle against terrorism has tested the laws of war.

BY CHRIS JENKS AND GEOFFREY CORN

War involves using military power to force an enemy into submission. It also almost always involves the capture and detention of enemy personnel. In common parlance, these captives are prisoners of war, or POWs. However, the status designation of captured enemies is often complex, and many situations exist where captives do not qualify for POW status. The consequence of this is potentially profound, and it's been a central challenge for the United States since military operations began after the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

U.S. military forces have captured and detained thousands in armed conflicts in Afghanistan, Iraq and other locations of this borderless war with al-Qaida. Force-on-force conflicts against an enemy state quickly transitioned into confrontations with irregular and hybrid forces, thus challenging the authority of the governments that assumed power in Iraq and Afghanistan after our initial victories.

Indeed, the bulk of U.S. combat operations have been prosecuted in support of these new governments, against the Taliban, al-Qaida and associated forces.

Under international law, the vast majority of captives were never entitled to POW status. Instead, they were regarded as "enemy belligerent detainees." Nonetheless, like POWs, they were held for the duration of the conflict to prevent them from returning to hostilities, and many remain detained. A handful of them have been prosecuted at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, for war crimes, but detention to prevent their return to the conflict does not depend on a criminal conviction.

While preventive detention of enemy captives for the duration of hostilities is unremarkable, rarely in modern history has this authority been used in relation to a conflict that seems to have no end, like the U.S. armed conflict with al-Qaida.

This has strained the perception of legitimacy, and led many to condemn what they view as indefinite detention without trial or conviction.

There's also the difficulty of determining who is the enemy. Unlike conventional enemies whose status is normally indicated by uniforms or identity cards, military (and at times judicial) authorities must piece together a jigsaw puzzle of conduct, statements and associations to determine who is, and who is not, a belligerent. The process is made even more complex with a deliberately dispersed terrorist organization.

Ultimately, U.S. detention operations are, like all other aspects of wartime military operations, governed by law and policy. While critics lambast the United States for what they consider overzealous assertions of legal detention authority, the truth is much more nuanced. Perhaps in no other area of our ongoing military campaign has there been a greater effort to develop a credible and effective legal framework to balance the needs of military necessity with the interests of human dignity. This process has been an evolution, largely because of a lack of a comprehensive international legal framework to address the need to detain "unprivileged" enemy belligerents, but also because of the need to correct mistakes made early in this war's detention saga.

What has developed over the past 14 years is an amalgam of rules and procedures drawn from international and domestic law, intended to minimize both the risk that an enemy will be allowed to return to the fight and the possibility of unjustifiably detaining individuals who pose no genuine risk of doing so.

WHAT LAW APPLIES? The law of armed conflict is the international law that regulates war. The regulatory framework for armed conflicts is divided into two categories: international armed conflict (IAC) and non-international armed conflict (NIAC), each with different applicable law. An IAC requires armed hostilities between at least two countries. Accordingly, the initial U.S. conflict in Afghanistan in 2001 and the conflict in Iraq in 2003 were both IACs. In contrast, NIACs are armed conflicts that don't involve a country fighting another country, but instead involve hostilities between a state and an organized non-state belligerent group or even between multiple non-state groups. The classic NIAC is civil war, where the government is fighting one or more insurgent groups.

Most of the detention-related challenges we've faced since 9/11 resulted from the inverse

relationship between the frequency of NIACs and the extent of the law in place to regulate them.

Most of the law of armed conflict, including the 1949 Geneva Conventions, applies only during IACs. In contrast, there is a paucity of law applicable to NIACs. This creates a profound regulatory gap, because NIACs – the conflicts against non-state groups such as insurgents and other hybrid enemies – occur far more frequently than IACs. Indeed, some estimate that over the past 50 years, 90 percent of the armed conflicts have been NIACs. Thus, while there is a comprehensive body of law for the kinds of international conflicts that rarely occur, far less law exists for the kinds of conflicts that do. It was into this regulatory gap that the United States fell following 9/11 – a gap that is particularly significant in the area of detention.

STATUS AND REVIEW In IACs, captured enemy soldiers are detained as POWs. Why? Based on their status as members of the enemy armed forces, they are presumptively a threat. They are detained to prevent them from continuing to fight. And it doesn't matter what the soldier was doing at the time of capture. Infantryman, special forces operative, clerk/typist – as long as they are members of the enemy armed forces, they are subject to detention.

The law of armed conflict considers and treats civilians very differently than members of the military, as it should. For example, while the captured Iraqi soldier is detained based on his status (as a soldier), the Iraqi civilian is not. The civilian may be detained (called internment for civilians), but only when the individual's conduct indicates that internment is necessary for imperative reasons of security.

When the rationale behind detention is understood, the conduct of that detention and how it ends makes sense. POWs, captured to prevent them from returning to hostilities, may be detained until hostilities end. And because it is their status that justifies detention, no type of hearing or review is required, only a determination of that status. Only when hostilities end, eliminating the risk the POW will return to the fight, is repatriation required.

In contrast, civilians may be interned only so long as they remain a threat. The law of armed conflict contains a review process by which, at least twice a year, the detaining military authority reconsiders whether the civilian still poses a security threat such that internment is warranted.

Unfortunately, the law of armed conflict provides far less clarity about the status of potential detainees in NIACs. This has required the United States to rely on customary international law principles that provide the foundation for all law of armed conflict treaties, to include the handful of treaty provisions developed specifically for NIAC. But it has also required extension of rules developed for IACs into the NIAC realm.

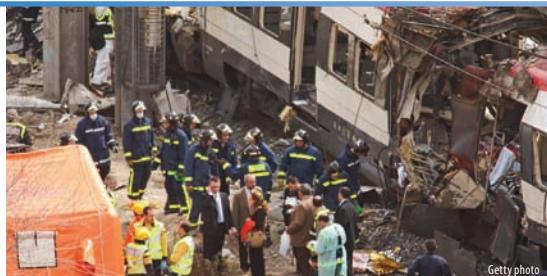
For example, the United States considers members of non-state belligerent groups – like al-Qaida operatives – subject to detention to prevent return to hostilities, as if they were POWs. However, because of the seemingly unlimited duration of the war, and the complexity of assessing their status as members of non-state belligerent groups, the United States has also extended the individualized cause and periodic review rules applicable to civilians in IACs to these detainees. Thus, whether detained in Afghanistan or Cuba, each detainee is provided an initial status review hearing and annual reviews to validate the continued military necessity for detention. Finally, as the result of Supreme Court decisions, all detainees at Guantanamo Bay may challenge the review decisions in federal civilian court.

DETAINEE TREATMENT Whether detained in an IAC or NIAC, the law of armed conflict requires that all detainees be treated humanely, which

basically means that U.S. forces must protect them from harm and do no harm to them. While there was some confusion over applicability to al-Qaida detainees early in the war, this is no longer the case. Today, any person in U.S. custody is protected by this humane-treatment obligation.

For detainees who qualify as POWs, the law of armed conflict provides an additional protection known as “combatant’s privilege” or “combatant immunity.” During an armed conflict, members of the armed forces are lawfully permitted to use lethal force and take any number of actions that would be criminal outside the context of armed conflict. For example, there is simply no legal authority to intentionally kill someone in peacetime based only on status; such a killing is murder. But the law of armed conflict legally permits intentionally killing an enemy belligerent operative during armed conflict based solely on such status. As a result, it grants immunity from criminal sanction for this exercise of “combatant’s privilege.” While the soldier granted this immunity is subject to detention as a POW, the detaining nation is barred from prosecuting him for his lawful wartime conduct.

No such privilege extends to non-state belligerents in NIACs, nor even to soldiers in an IAC whose conduct violates the law of armed conflict (for example, killing a POW or torturing a detainee). Accordingly, the United States determined from the



March 11, 2004

Madrid bombings

Terrorists with possible al-Qaida connections launch a series of bombings on the Madrid commuter train system in Spain 911 days after the 9/11 attacks in the United States. The death toll is 191, far deadlier than any previous terrorist attack in Spain.

March 31, 2004

Blackwater deaths

Insurgents in Fallujah ambush a convoy, killing four private U.S. military contractors. A mob sets the bodies on fire, and the corpses are dragged through the streets before they are hung over a bridge. Photos of the killings are released worldwide.

April 4, 2004

First Battle of Fallujah

In response to the contractor killings and mutilations, U.S. forces launch a major military mission known as Operation Vigilant Resolve to apprehend the perpetrators, clear guerrillas from Fallujah and establish security. This mission is later handed off to Iraqi forces, but instability continues and the insurgency grows, leading to an eventual second battle there.

June 18, 2004

Pakistan attacks

The United States begins a series of drone attacks in northwest Pakistan to defeat Taliban and al-Qaida fighters in the mountainous Waziristan area. With logistics and air support from the United States, the Pakistani Army captures or kills numerous al-Qaida operatives, including 9/11 mastermind Khalid Sheikh Mohammed.



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outset of the war with al-Qaida that captured and “unprivileged” enemy belligerents were subject not only to detention but to civilian or military court trial for their violent actions.

If the U.S. military can already detain these captives, what is the point of prosecuting them? If he is convicted, he will be detained. If he is acquitted, he is still subject to preventive belligerent detention. This apparent anomaly is the source of a lot of confusion.

Trial and conviction do matter, even for someone who will remain in detention after acquittal. Most notably, if convicted, the detention will no longer be merely preventive, but punitive. This means that even if hostilities end, detention will continue for the duration of the sentence. It may also mean that the detainee will be subjected to capital punishment. Second, the conditions of detention may change substantially, as punitive detention is normally more onerous than preventive detention.

As noted by the Supreme Court in an early Guantanamo decision, detention of enemy belligerents during armed conflict is a “necessary incident of waging war.” But that same decision also noted that if the nature of a armed conflict were to become significantly different from those that informed the development of the law of armed conflict, it may be necessary to reconsider the rules for detention.



Getty photo

July 7, 2005

7/7 attacks

Al-Qaida suicide bombers launch a coordinated series of attacks on London’s transportation system. Bombs are detonated on three London Underground trains, and another explosive strikes a double-decker bus in the city. Fifty-two civilians are killed, and more than 700 others are injured. Future al-Qaida leader Ayman al-Zawahiri appears in a pre-attack videotape made by one of the suicide bombers and broadcast by Al Jazeera in September.

In many ways, this seems to have predicted the evolution of U.S. detention practice since 9/11. The United States continues to preventively detain enemy belligerent operatives, and pursue prosecution of many it believes violated the law of armed conflict. But it has also implemented procedures in an effort to balance the necessity of detention with the risk of unjustified indefinite deprivation of liberty. While there are no easy answers to the detention challenge, almost all observers would agree that we are in a better place today than when this challenge first emerged. ¶

Chris Jenks is an assistant professor of law at the Southern Methodist University Dedman School of Law in Dallas. A graduate of the U.S. Military Academy, he previously served in the Army, first as an infantry officer in Germany, Kuwait and Bosnia, and later as a judge advocate in Korea and Iraq and chief of the Army’s international law branch in the Pentagon.

Geoffrey Corn is a professor of law at South Texas College of Law in Houston. A retired Army lieutenant colonel, he graduated from OCS in 1984, served as an intelligence officer in Panama and spent the remainder of his career as a judge advocate. After retiring in 2004, he served as the Army’s senior law-of-war expert in the Pentagon.

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American Legion National Commander Tom Bock, whose son, Adam, was a Chinook helicopter pilot deployed to Iraq in 2005 when The American Legion passed Resolution 169, expressing support not only for the men and women fighting, but for their mission, too.

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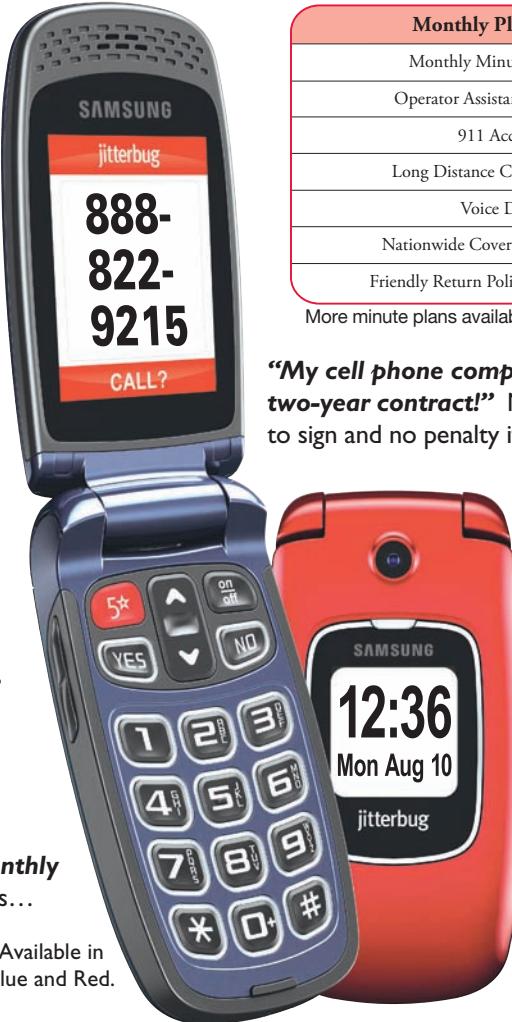
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The PRICE of one COFFEE DRINK

Dues increase of \$5 per year needed to fulfill Legion's mission to assist veterans, troops, youth and those coming home from war.

Nearly a decade has passed since The American Legion's last national per-capita dues increase. During that span, the U.S. cost of living has climbed 13 percent. An economic downturn unseen since the Great Depression has trimmed interest income from American Legion investments by over 35 percent. And the pool of veterans eligible for American Legion membership has declined by about 20 percent.

With more than 3 million veterans of the global war on terrorism restarting civilian lives, or soon to do so, and looking to The American Legion for help, the National Executive Committee passed a resolution at the 2015 Spring Meetings in Indianapolis to recommend a \$5 per-capita annual increase in national membership dues. It amounts to about 1.4 cents a day.

The NEC's recommendation comes at a time when the need for American Legion advocacy, expertise, influence, services and programs are sorely needed in every corner of our nation. Veterans are waiting too long for benefits claims decisions and medical appointments, and need well-trained and accredited American Legion service officers right now and for years to come. Nearly 4,000 veterans sought help at about two dozen Veterans Benefits Center events over the last year where they received firsthand, on-the-spot assistance, including over \$1 million in retroactive, past-due disability benefits.

The most obvious takeaway from those events is that veterans and their families need, and will continue to need, American Legion representation because the road to VA reform is certain to be long and fraught with challenges.

And, at a time when the world is shrinking and speeding up through social media, young people face multiple temptations and opportunities for unhealthy choices that American Legion youth programs can counteract. One of the recent American Legion National Junior Shooting Sports champions made the point that the program gave him the focus and drive to turn what he called bad report cards in high school to grade point averages of 3.6 and 4.0 in his final two years.

This is not a time to divest from The American Legion's ability to serve veterans, members of the U.S. Armed Forces or young people. A national \$5 per-capita dues increase – about the price of one large coffee drink over the span of a year – can prevent National Headquarters from having to cut programs



Pexels

and services over the course of an entire decade.

The natural attrition of veterans from early-20th-century war eras has contributed greatly to a 16 percent drop in membership since the last dues increase passed. That accounts for a nearly \$5.7 million revenue reduction since 2007.

To offset that, National Headquarters has worked to stimulate corporate relationships, improve its charitable giving program and reduce operational costs through digital technology. All these efforts have helped stave off earlier dues increase recommendations that would have been necessary given the economy and membership situation.

The Legion's non-member fundraising program has grown significantly and is now netting about \$1.4 million to the positive, but it took more than three years to get there. The national television advertising program is off to a similar start, and a number of technological initiatives like online joining, renewal and sustained giving help the bottom line. Affinity relationships with great allies like USAA, The American Legion's preferred provider of financial services, have also been vital.

All these efforts are trending toward reduced reliance on membership dues, but it will take some time to get there. Today, more than 200,000 Legionnaires renew annually online, reducing the cost of mailing and hand-processing renewal notices. And although the number of online transactions is growing, it's still less than 10 percent of the total membership.

The American Legion's ability to succeed over the next decade – including promotion of our values and services to post-9/11-generation veterans and their families – depends on positive cash flow and the ability to invest in the future. Without this dues increase, National Headquarters would be looking at entering its centennial celebration year staring at a estimated budget deficit of \$6.78 million.

Nearly a century has passed since The American Legion's founders made their time-honored commitment to serve veterans, troops and families in their communities, states and nation. American Legion members have never retreated from that commitment or failed to invest in future generations. At a time of war, a time of homecoming and a time of need among our nation's veterans, families and young people, there is no better place to invest an extra \$5 a year.

Chicago Doctor Invents Affordable Hearing Aid Outperforms Many Higher Priced Hearing Aids

Reported by J. Page

CHICAGO: A local board-certified Ear, Nose, and Throat (ENT) physician, Dr. S. Cherukuri, has just shaken up the hearing aid industry with the invention of a medical-grade, affordable hearing aid. This revolutionary hearing aid is designed to help millions of people with hearing loss who cannot afford—or do not wish to pay—the much higher cost of traditional hearing aids.

"Perhaps the best quality-to-price ratio in the hearing aid industry" — Dr. Babu, M.D.
Board-Certified ENT Physician

Dr. Cherukuri knew that untreated hearing loss could lead to depression, social isolation, anxiety, and symptoms consistent with Alzheimer's dementia. **He could not understand why the cost for hearing aids was so high when the prices on so many consumer electronics like TVs, DVD players, cell phones, and digital cameras had fallen.**

Since Medicare and most private insurance do not cover the costs of hearing aids, which traditionally run between \$2,000-\$6,000 for a pair, many of the doctor's patients could not afford the expense. Dr. Cherukuri's goal was to find a reasonable solution that would help with the most common types of hearing loss at an affordable price, not unlike the **"one-size-fits-most"** reading glasses available at drug stores.

He evaluated numerous hearing devices and sound amplifiers, including those seen on television. Without fail, almost all of these were found to amplify bass/low frequencies (below 1000 Hz) and not useful in amplifying the frequencies related to the human voice.

Inspiration From a Surprising Source

The doctor's inspiration to defeat the powers-that-be that kept inexpensive hearing aids out of the hands of the public actually came from a new cell phone he had just purchased. **"I felt that if someone could devise an**

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affordable device like an iPhone® for about \$200 that could do all sorts of things, I could create a hearing aid at a similar price."

Affordable Hearing Aid With Superb Performance

The high cost of hearing aids is a result of layers of middlemen and expensive unnecessary features. Dr. Cherukuri concluded that it would be possible to develop a medical-grade hearing aid without sacrificing the quality of components. The result is the **MDHearingAid PRO**, well under \$200 each when buying a pair. **It has been declared to be the best low-cost hearing aid that amplifies the range of sounds associated with the human voice without overly amplifying background noise.**

Tested By Leading Doctors and Audiologists

The MDHearingAid PRO has been rigorously tested by leading ENT physicians and audiologists who have unanimously agreed that the **sound quality and output in many cases exceeds more expensive hearing aids.**

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"I have been wearing hearing aids for over 25 years and these are the best behind-the-ear aids I have tried. Their sound quality rivals that of my \$3,000 custom pair of Phonak Xtra digital ITE."

—Gerald Levy

"I have a \$2,000 Resound Live hearing aid in my left ear and the MDHearingAid PRO in the right ear. I am not able to notice a significant difference in sound quality between the two hearing aids."

—Dr. May, ENT Physician

"They work so great, my mother says she hasn't heard this well in years, even with her \$2,000 digital! It was so great to see the joy on her face. She is 90 years young again."

—Al Peterson

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HONOR & REMEMBRANCE

Female World War II vet at last joins Legion

Sitting upright in a chaise in her living room, Gladys "Bunny" Strong rested comfortably as American Legion National Commander Mike Helm sat beside her, gently holding her hand. He'd come to Ludlow, Vt., to acknowledge the overlooked, underappreciated service of a veteran who for decades felt unworthy of the title "Legionnaire."

Helm met Strong while campaigning for national commander. Although her stateside service as a female Marine during World War II made her eligible to join The American Legion, she joined the Auxiliary seven decades ago and never thought twice about Legion membership.

Strong's husband Richard, also a World War II veteran, joined Ballard-Hobart Post 36. She preferred to be around the women in the Auxiliary, and served as unit president.

"The club itself didn't welcome women," says Strong's daughter, Jean. "They couldn't go in the bar or attend official meetings. I remember my mother saying she didn't want to take away from my father's service. He served in Germany and she didn't. She felt she didn't really serve."

Helm asked Ned Bowen, Post 36 commander, and Linda Perham, department adjutant, to help him bring Strong into the Legion. Members surprised her with a membership card during the Department of Vermont's convention in June.



National Commander Mike Helm visits Gladys Strong at her Vermont home shortly before her death July 7. Photo by Andrea Dickerson

The post also hosted a women veterans forum and reception, with special guest facilitators Legion Executive Director Verna Jones, Veterans Employment & Education Commission chairwoman Denise Rohan and Perham. Helm challenged attendees to honor the service and sacrifice of all veterans, including female Legionnaires and women veterans who are Auxiliary members.

"I am proud to say that we have female veterans serving in virtually every capacity of the Legion," he said. "There are women in the Legion – ones who were welcomed and ones who weren't, necessarily – who have stepped forward and taken their rightful place. We need to make sure that we are reaching out to all our women veterans."

– Andrea Dickerson

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OPERATION COMFORT WARRIORS

Legion helps connect service dog to veteran

When VA doctors recommended that Army veteran James Harris have a service dog, his mother, Sherri Page, reached out to The American Legion for help. Within eight days, Harris met his new service dog, Sky.

"I'm really touched," said Harris, a member of Post 73 in Valley Center, Kan. "Overjoyed is the best word."

The Department of Kansas 5th District Legion Family provided dog food, a kennel and two dog beds. An OCW grant covered adoption fees.



Photo by Travis Heying

AGING IS NATURAL, GIVING UP ON YOUR VIRILITY ISN'T!

**BRING BACK THE BEST YEARS OF YOUR LIFE
... HERE'S HOW ONE MAN DID IT!**

Although this would otherwise be an embarrassing subject – I feel strongly about sharing my recent experience with others my age. Simply put, **I'm 57 years old and even though I'm in good health overall, my body just doesn't respond like it used to.** Intimacy and virility have become an issue.

Recently, I found myself struggling to "perform" - I began losing my confidence, and with it, my sense of "male prowess". I was feeling a great deal of pressure and embarrassment, my wife was beginning to think it was something she did or didn't do – it wasn't.

I wasn't comfortable discussing my situation with anyone – not even my doctor – so in a desperate attempt to find some help, I privately did some research on the web.

First, I found that many **HEALTHY** men experience a decrease in virility with age. **I wasn't alone!** Good blood circulation is the key to maintaining virility, and there are a number of factors that can weaken it.

Armed with this new information, I began to search through the many "male enhancement" products on the net. I found a pill and patch for everything and anything, but **one product stood out among them - PROZEMAX is completely different** – not a pill or a patch, this surprisingly effective topical formula is delivered directly to the "source" – where I needed it most. Best of all, **PROZEMAX is recommended by a Leading Physician**, and you don't need a prescription. I don't need to swallow a pill, prescription or not, or wear some kind of patch on my shoulder!

After trying **PROZEMAX** just once, I could actually feel it working immediately, it felt incredible! I LITERALLY STARTED FEELING IT IN UNDER 60 SECONDS! What a difference! I couldn't believe it - virility like I haven't felt in years! My driver's license says I'm 57, but thanks to **PROZEMAX**, my wife says I'm 18 again! It feels great! I now know it's normal to experience some problems with virility at my age, but **PROZEMAX** let me deal with it naturally. No pills – no patches – and even better – no embarrassing appointment with the doctor.

Try **PROZEMAX**. You'll feel it working immediately, and get back to living your life!

Jim S.
Miami, FL

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Individual results may vary. These statements have not been evaluated by the FDA. This product is not intended to diagnose, treat, cure or prevent any disease. The information featured above has been compiled from actual letters we've received from a few of our many satisfied customers. P011AMLE0815

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SAYS I'M 57, BUT MY WIFE
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Syrian cultural heritage sites, especially in Islamic State-controlled regions, are threatened by looting and destruction. AP



MIDDLE EAST

CULTURE WAR

"A group of unlikely warriors is training to fight on a little-known front of Syria's civil war: the battle for the country's cultural heritage," *The Wall Street Journal* reports. "The recruits aren't grizzled fighters but graying academics, more at home on an archaeological dig than a battlefield."

The mission of this so-called culture brigade is to save ancient artifacts, religious relics and archaeological sites from profiteers and ISIS fighters. "Looting, often with bulldozers, is now the militant group's second-largest source of finance after oil," the paper notes.

"What started as opportunistic theft by some has turned into an organized transnational business that is helping fund terror," explains Michael Danti, an archaeologist at Boston University and State Department adviser. "It's the gravest cultural emergency I've seen."

Unlike World War II's "monuments men" – made famous by the 2014 film of the same name – these 200 or so archaeologists have "few resources and are seldom supported by armed units."

At secret sites, they are "instructed on how to get to key sites and document both what is there and what is already missing. Another skill: how to hide precious objects that may be at risk of looting, and record the GPS locations so they can be retrieved at a later date."

Less than 1 percent of the artifacts stolen from churches and Bronze Age towns across Iraq and Syria has been recovered, the *Journal* reports.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Putin hides Russian role in Ukraine

Desperate to hide direct military involvement in Ukraine, Russian President Vladimir Putin is destroying the bodies of fallen soldiers, Bloomberg News reports, citing U.S. lawmakers who have traveled to Ukraine on fact-finding missions in recent months.

"The Russians are trying to hide their casualties by taking mobile crematoriums with them," House Armed Services Committee Chairman Mac Thornberry, R-Texas, told Bloomberg. "They are trying to hide not only from the world, but from the Russian people, their involvement." Thornberry said Ukraine's allegations are "largely supported by U.S. intelligence and others."

Rep. Seth Moulton, D-Mass., a Marine Corps veteran, called the Russian government's actions "horrific and shameful."

POLITICS

Presidential poll

64	Percent who see George H.W. Bush in a favorable light
64	Percent who see Bill Clinton in a favorable light
56	Percent who see Jimmy Carter in a favorable light
52	Percent who see George W. Bush in a favorable light
49	Percent who see Barack Obama in a favorable light

Source: CNN/ORC International

VERBATIM

Criticism of Sen. John McCain's service is outside the bounds of normal political discourse ... He and his fellow prisoners in Vietnam often endured torture, starvation and sometimes death while defending our great nation. They are heroes. There can be no argument about that.

National Commander Mike Helm, responding to business mogul Donald Trump's statement at the Family Values Summit in Ames, Iowa, that Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., is "a war hero because he was captured. I like people who weren't captured."

Trump is running for the 2016 GOP presidential nomination. Source: The Hill

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Bankrolling Bashar

Iran spends between \$6 billion and \$15 billion annually propping up Syrian dictator Bashar Assad, according to a Bloomberg News analysis. The lower-end estimate comes from the office of the United Nations' special envoy for Syria. The upper-end figure comes courtesy of Nadim Shehadi, director of the Fares Center for Eastern Mediterranean Studies at Tufts University.



DEFENSE MOBILE

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MEMBER DISCOUNTS

New mobile service company offers discount to Legionnaires

Defense Mobile is fulfilling its mission of connecting and improving the lives of U.S. military veterans and current servicemembers by delivering superior wireless coverage on the nation's largest networks, at discounted savings to its members. As the only mobile service built exclusively for veterans, military servicemembers and their families, Defense Mobile recently established an alliance with The American Legion to enhance communication with veterans and to offer Legionnaires discounts on their mobile service.

"If your mission is to connect and improve the lives of veterans, you can't do that alone; you don't do it alone," says Brendan Reilly, CEO and co-founder of Defense Mobile. "We want to (work) with organizations that have the ability to reach veterans and support them in a way that they deserve, and The American Legion is doing that."

Reilly's vision comes from his years supporting the military by leading technological initiatives for agencies within the Department of Defense. With the help of his brother, Andrew, Reilly achieved his vision by creating an executive team of top military leaders and partnering with the nation's three largest networks.

The Connecticut-based mobile service company offers individual and family plans at low cost with no-contract plans and no activation fees, as well as a 30-day money-back guarantee. For unlimited talk/text, individual plans start at \$35 a month, and family plans start at \$95 for two lines.

When mobile users switch to Defense Mobile, their network and coverage remains the same, but their monthly bill and service support come from Defense Mobile. Customers can keep their current phones and Defense Mobile will send a new SIM card, or they can purchase a new smartphone through the company.

To thank Legionnaires for their continuing service, Defense Mobile is offering a 10 percent discount on mobile service for life when a member verifies his or her military affiliation using his or her Legion member ID number. This offer is available to current members, as well as to those who join the Legion in the future.

"I was convinced from the beginning that low prices alone and having the best coverage on America's most reliable networks wasn't enough," says Andrew, a co-founder of Defense Mobile. "We set out to really be different and be a wireless provider that stays true to its mission. We are the only carrier in the United States with an exclusive focus on the military."

Besides having cheaper mobile service plans, other incentives to switch to Defense Mobile are its veteran-friendly customer service and free benefits app, Reilly says.

Defense Mobile's customer service agents are all veterans, giving customers an "instant bond," he adds. "It's not someone saying, 'Oh, your phone's not working.' It's, 'Sir, I get it. I will do whatever it takes. You have my personal commitment because I'm a vet, you're a vet, and we're in this together.'

"If you walk through the halls here, everyone is a vet, or touched by the military in some way, and is dedicated to connecting and improving the lives of our members."

Defense Mobile also offers all veterans – whether they have service with the company or not – its free miliSOURCE app, which helps veterans understand the benefits at the local and state level for which they may be eligible.

Additionally, to stay true to its mission of focusing on the military, Defense Mobile donates 10 percent of net proceeds to organizations that support military and veterans families in need. And every Friday, the company sends out an email to customers detailing how their membership allowed them to donate to a particular military-focused organization.

"We are using this platform to connect the veteran community and trying to see how we can improve it by bringing the military community together better," Reilly says. "We want to bring technology and our network capabilities to enhance the Legion's ability to support veterans. Everybody working together makes this better for veterans."

Legion members can learn more about Defense Mobile and how to start receiving discounted cell service by visiting www.defensemobile.com/legion.

BUSINESS

A short history of veteran entrepreneurship

ASK THE VETREPRENEUR

MARK ROCKEFELLER

Veteran entrepreneurship is a longstanding tradition in the United States. Following World War II, millions of veterans became business owners. This "greatest generation" sparked an economic boom, and the nation flourished. Nearly 49 percent of all veterans

went on to own or operate businesses, from small manufacturing plants to traditional mom-and-pop shops on the corner of Main Street. Owning a small business was an integral part of the ethos of the time – the American Dream, in which freedom included prosperity and success achieved through hard work, in a society with few barriers.

What does veteran entrepreneurship in America look like today?

According to the U.S. Small Business Administration, more than 2.5 million businesses are operated by veterans nationwide. Nearly 25 percent of all returning Afghanistan and Iraq war veterans want to become small-business owners, and possess the same can-do approach to small-business ownership that their predecessors did. They have the discipline, drive, leadership and teamwork skills necessary to make them successful entrepreneurs.

How can I learn more about veteran entrepreneurship?

A great place to start is the Syracuse University Institute for Veterans and Military Families (IVMF) paper "Introduction to Business Ownership." This gives an overview of the relationship between veterans and entrepreneurship, and what veterans can expect as they transition into life as an entrepreneur.

Mark L. Rockefeller is an entrepreneur, attorney and veteran. He is the co-founder and CEO of StreetShares, an online marketplace where investors compete to provide shares of commercial loans to small businesses. StreetShares has been described as "Shark Tank" meets eBay" for small business loans and has secured a commitment of \$200 million to fund veteran-owned businesses.

Have a question? Send it to questions@streetshares.com.

Follow Mark on Twitter: @markrockefeller or StreetShares @StreetShares

**CENTENNIAL**

Post 124, Westfield, Mass.

For about 10 years in the 1920s and 1930s, American Legion Post 124 of Westfield, Mass., sponsored a group of Sea Scouts through Boy Scouts of America (BSA). Many went on to serve in the military and become members of Post 124; one even served as post commander.

Today, Sea Scouts is a specialized part of BSA's Venturing program, open to young men and women 14 to 21. Units, called "ships," focus on sailing and cruising sailboats or power vessels. Swimming, lifesaving, first aid, Coast Guard Auxiliary sailing and seamanship, and CPR courses are taught as well.

Share your post's legacy

Upload stories, photos and videos of your post's history on the Legion's Centennial Celebration website.

www.legion.org/centennial

EDUCATION

In-state tuition deadlines

MY GI BILL

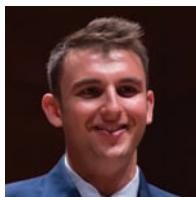
Q: Under Section 702 of the Choice Act, if a veteran is more than three years past separation when enrolling in school for the first time, is he or she considered a covered individual eligible for in-state tuition?

A: A student who enrolls in school more than three years after discharge is not considered a covered individual. However, a student who enrolls in school within three years of discharge will remain eligible as long as he or she is using Post-9/11 GI Bill or Montgomery GI Bill-Active Duty (MGIB-AD) benefits and remains continuously enrolled at that school. Continuity of enrollment is not broken by regularly scheduled breaks between courses, semesters or terms, and students do not have to enroll in summer sessions or terms to maintain continuous enrollment.

Valerie Heffner is a Marine Corps veteran and member of American Legion Post 27 in Arizona. askvalerie@legion.org

AWARDS**Legion honors academy grads**

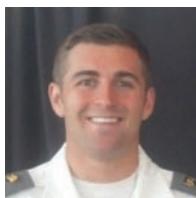
In May, The American Legion's national vice commanders presented awards to exceptional students at each of the five military academies.



Ens. Christian Brindamour
Manchester,
Conn.

Brindamour received the Legion's award

for excellence in athletics at the U.S. Coast Guard Academy in New London, Conn. National Vice Commander Dick Neville presented the award.



**2nd Lt.
Matthew Bryan**
Medford, N.J.

Bryan received the Legion's award for the highest standing

in chemistry at the U.S. Military Academy in West Point, N.Y. National Vice Commander Paul Sanford presented the award.



**2nd Lt. Rebecca
A. Esselstein**
Dayton, Ohio

Esselstein received the Legion's award for the highest

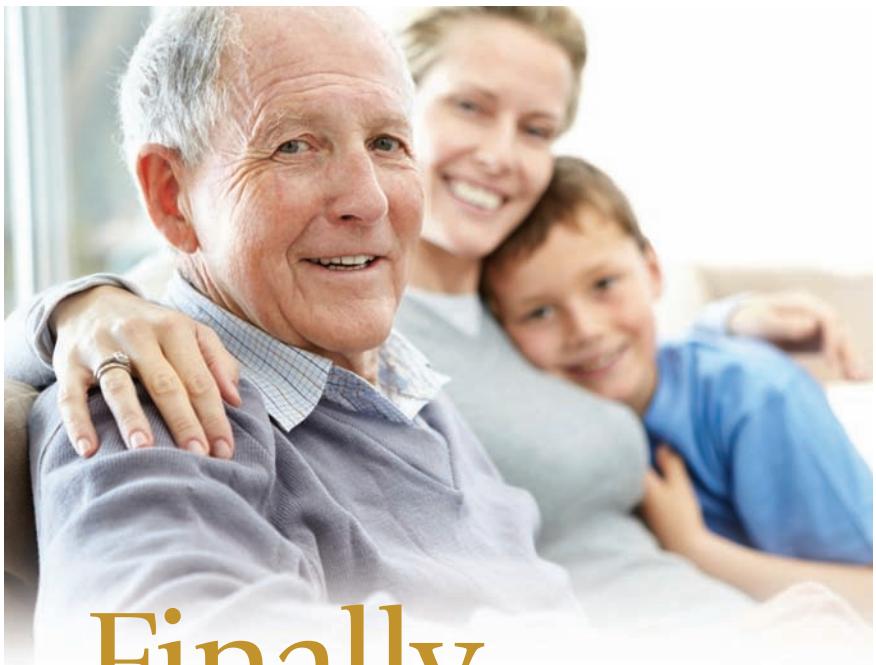
proficiency in all academic subjects at the U.S. Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colo. National Vice Commander Doug Haggan presented the award.

Ens. Andrea Howard Norcross, Ga.

Howard received the Legion's award for the highest marks in English, history and government at the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis, Md. National Vice Commander Bill Bryant presented the award.

Ens. Jake Wade Merritt Island, Fla.

Wade received the Legion's award in the category of national security at the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy in Kings Point, N.Y., but could not attend the ceremony because he was at sea. National Vice Commander Jake Jacobs was to present the award.



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Their efforts include seeking out all methods to secure badly-needed financial assistance for asbestos victims – either through lawsuits, negotiated monetary settlements or corporate bankruptcy trust fund payments – for qualifying asbestos victims and their loved ones.

If you are a victim of Mesothelioma (or asbestos-related Lung Cancer), or if you are the surviving spouse or child of a victim, get the support and compensation you rightly deserve.

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Prior results do not guarantee a future outcome. We may associate with local firms in states wherein we do not maintain an office. If no recovery, no fees or costs are charged, unless prohibited by State Law or Rule. Not licensed to practice law in Louisiana. Gary Klein, Esq. (Lawrence Goldhirsch, Esq., member of FL Bar). *Clients are accepted based on specifics of their Asbestos disease and if their date of diagnosis conforms to their state's statute of limitations.

ASK A SERVICE OFFICER

VA benefits for Camp Lejeune water contamination

**Cajun Comeau**

Department Service Officer, North Carolina

Q: Does my family qualify for VA benefits due to Camp Lejeune's history of water contamination?

A: From the 1950s through the 1980s, people living or working at U.S. Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune in Jacksonville, N.C., were potentially exposed to drinking water

contaminated with industrial solvents, benzene and other chemicals. Family members who lived at Camp Lejeune for 30 days or more between Aug. 1, 1953, and Dec. 31, 1987, may be eligible for VA health benefits through the Camp Lejeune Family Member Program for 15 conditions: esophageal cancer, breast cancer, kidney cancer, multiple myeloma, renal toxicity, female infertility, scleroderma, non-Hodgkin lymphoma, lung cancer, bladder cancer, leukemia, myelodysplastic syndromes, hepatic steatosis, miscarriage and neurobehavioral effects.

VA is reimbursing family members for eligible out-of-pocket medical expenses related to the 15 covered conditions. However, VA pays for treatment only after it has received payment from all other health plans.

To apply for reimbursement, you must show:

- Your relationship to a veteran who served at Camp Lejeune, with a marriage license or birth certificate;
- That you lived on the base for 30 days or more between Aug. 1, 1953, and Dec. 31, 1987, with copies of orders or base housing; and
- That you paid health-care expenses for a covered condition on or after March 26, 2013 (the date Congress began to cover the Camp Lejeune Family Member Program), with receipts.

This program only covers the conditions listed above; it doesn't meet the minimum standard for health coverage under the Affordable Care Act.

If you meet the qualifications, apply online:

✉ www.clfamilymembers.fsc.va.gov

Find an service officer in your state:

✉ www.legion.org/serviceofficers

Do you have a question for Department of North Carolina Service Officer Cajun Comeau about the claims process or veterans benefits in general? Send it to askso@legion.org.



Boys Nation senators visit the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C., on July 19. Photo by Lucas Carter

BOYS NATION

2015 Boys Nation class keeps up with tradition

In July, the 69th session of American Legion Boys Nation brought together 98 young men from across the country, selected by their states' respective Boys State programs. Conducted at Marymount University in Arlington, Va., Boys Nation is Boys State on a larger scale, providing an even broader education and hands-on experience of the U.S. system of government.

Delegates elected Aravind Byju of Florida president by a close vote of 50 to 46. Peter Spectre of Maine was elected vice president after winning a coin toss to settle the first tie in more than 30 years.

Participants also traveled to sites throughout the Washington, D.C., area, including the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, the Korean War Veterans Memorial, the National World War II Memorial and Arlington National Cemetery. There, the young men laid a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknowns. They also explored the cemetery's grounds with counselor Mark Seavey, a writer for the Legion's Media & Communications Division, who has friends buried at Arlington. They visited their graves, as well as others suggested via Facebook.

In addition, delegates participated in a special memorial observance in Virginia, paying tribute to the four Marines and Navy sailor who were killed July 16 when a gunman burst into a Navy and Marine reserve center in Chattanooga, Tenn., and opened fire.

During their stay, the Boys Nation group visited a number of officials, too. At the Pentagon, Secretary of the Navy Ray Mabus spoke to the young men about his job and his own time at Boys State. They had the opportunity to shake hands with President Barack Obama at the White House, and spent time with American Legion National Commander Mike Helm at Post 136 in Greenbelt, Md.

Read stories, see photos and watch videos from Boys Nation:

✉ www.legion.org/boysnation

PERSONAL FINANCE



How to manage out-of-pocket medical costs

FOCUS ON FINANCES


J.J. MONTANARO

A whopping \$1,500.

To my surprise, that was my portion of a bill from a visit to the doctor last year. Talk about getting up close and personal with the health insurance concept of "cost-sharing."

To be fair, my doctor's office informed me what the tests were going to cost. I just ignored them and assumed the hard-to-swallow number would be subject to severe shrinkage after it went through my insurance company. Oops.

That big bill came with a lesson: know your coverage and manage your care to help control costs. As changes to our health-care system put more and more decisions in your hands, it's critical that you arm yourself with the knowledge to take charge of your care.

The first step in avoiding an expensive surprise is understanding the cost-sharing terminology. So let's review some of the key terms:

Premium. That's what you pay, typically on a monthly basis, for your health insurance. If your coverage is through your employer, it will be deducted on a pretax basis. If not, you may be eligible for special tax benefits based on the premium you pay.

Deductible. This is what you may have to fork over before your insurance begins to pay. One exception: most insurance policies cover the cost of preventive care – such as

immunizations, annual physicals, screenings and mammograms – without meeting a deductible.

Co-payments. This is a set cost you'll pay every time you visit the doctor, get a prescription, go to the emergency room or use health-care services or supplies. The co-pay will vary for different services. For example, a doctor's visit may be \$25, a trip to the ER \$100 and a generic prescription \$8.

Coinsurance. After paying your full deductible, you may be responsible for a portion of your health-care costs. For example, you may pay 10 percent or 20 percent, and your insurance will cover the rest of the cost of covered care. This shared approach toward medical expenses will continue until you hit your out-of-pocket maximum.

Out-of-pocket maximum. Every dime you pay in deductibles, co-payments and coinsurance payments counts toward this figure. Once you hit the maximum, your insurance covers the rest. The Affordable Care Act set the maximum out-of-pocket total at \$6,600 (\$13,200 for families) in 2015.

It sounds confusing, but knowing these terms can pay off. This year, I cut that \$1,500 bill down to \$216 by simply taking the test at a different facility. That's a tangible benefit of taking charge of your health care.

J.J. Montanaro is a certified financial planner with USAA, The American Legion's preferred provider of financial services. Submit questions for him online.

www.legion.org/usaa/focusonfinances

VERBATIM

...stop talking about how this terrorist's friends and family described him. His life? It didn't matter past the moment he chose to open fire on unarmed men. Men who were husbands, sons, brothers, fathers. They mattered. They matter. And you should know their names.

Katie Foley, blogger and wife of an active-duty Marine, on the fatal shootings of four Marines and one sailor in Chattanooga, Tenn., on July 16. According to the FBI, 24-year-old Muhammad Abdulazeez forced his way into a Navy and Marine Corps reserve center, killing Gunnery Sgt. Thomas Sullivan, Sgt. Carson Holmquist, Lance Cpl. Skip Wells, Staff Sgt. David Wyatt and Navy Logistics Specialist Randall Smith.

Source: Military.com



Bryan Thaboua kneels with his 8-month-old son, Cooper, in front of the Lee Highway memorial for the Chattanooga, Tenn., shooting victims. Muhammad Youssef Abdulazeez attacked two military facilities July 16 in a shooting rampage that took the lives of four Marines and one sailor.

Photo by Dan Henry/AP

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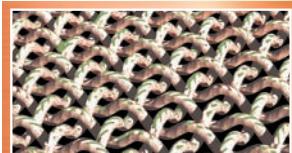
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How to submit a reunion

The American Legion Magazine publishes reunion notices for veterans. Send notices to **The American Legion Magazine, Attn: Reunions, P.O. Box 1055, Indianapolis, IN 46206**, fax (317) 630-1280, e-mail reunions@legion.org or submit information via our website, www.legion.org/reunions.

Include the branch of service and complete name of the group, no abbreviations, with your request. The listing also should include the reunion dates and city, along with a contact name, telephone number and e-mail address. Listings are publicized free of charge.

Your notice will appear on our Web site within a week and will remain available online until the final day of your reunion. Upon submission, please allow three months for your reunion to be published in print. Due to the large number of reunions, The American Legion Magazine will publish a group's listing only once a year.

Notices should be sent at least six months prior to the reunion to ensure timely publication.

Other notices

"In Search Of" is a means of getting in touch with people from your unit to plan a reunion. We do not publish listings that seek people for interviews, research purposes, military photos or help in filing a VA claim. Listings must include the name of the unit from which you seek people, the time period and the location, as well as a contact name, telephone number and e-mail address. Send notices to **The American Legion Magazine, Attn: "In Search Of," P.O. Box 1055, Indianapolis, IN 46206**, fax (317) 630-1280 or e-mail reunions@legion.org.

The magazine will not publish names of individuals, only the name of the unit. Listings are published free of charge.

Life Membership notices are published for Legionnaires who have been awarded life

memberships by their posts. This does not include a member's own Paid-Up-For-Life membership. Notices must be submitted on official forms, which may be obtained by sending a self-addressed stamped envelope to **The American Legion Magazine, Attn: Life Memberships, P.O. Box 1055, Indianapolis, IN 46206**.

"Comrades in Distress" listings must be approved by the Legion's Veterans Affairs & Rehabilitation division. If you are seeking to verify an injury received during service, contact your Legion department service officer for information on how to publish a notice.

To respond to a "Comrades in Distress" listing, send a letter to **The American Legion Magazine, Attn: Comrades in Distress, P.O. Box 1055, Indianapolis, IN 46206**. Include the listing's CID number in your response.

"Taps" notices are published only for Legionnaires who served as department commanders or national officers.

AIR FORCE / ARMY AIR FORCES

1st Flt Det (Nha Trang AB, Vietnam, 1964-1972), Dayton, OH, 10/19-22, Rob Locker, (614) 738-9670, relockerjr@cs.com; **7th Airlift Sqdn**, Seattle, 10/9, Gabriel Taylor, (253) 982-2080, gabriel.taylor@us.af.mil; **12th TFW (MacDill AFB, & Vietnam), 12th FEW/SFW (Bergstrom AFB & Korea) & Supporting Units**, Charleston, SC, 4/20-24, E.J. Sherwood, (480) 396-4681, ej12tfw@cox.net; **81st Ft Wing**, St. Louis, 9/12-15, Carl Russell, (480) 839-1061, cruessel13@cox.net; **384th Air Refueling Sqdn**, Wichita, KS, 10/23-25, Cheryl Schemanski, (316) 759-6150, cheryl.schemanski@us.af.mil; **F-4 Phantom II Society**, Tucson, AZ, 10/12-15, Bill Crean, (609) 932-5158, williamcrean@comcast.net; **Red Horse Sqdns**, Fort Walton Beach, FL, 10/12-16, Dick Aldinger, (407) 859-7436, famdinger@aol.com; **USAFFS**, St. Augustine, FL, 128-31, Jay Johnson, (321) 727-8041, jayjohnson@cfl.rr.com

ARMY

1st Bn 8th Cav 1st Air Cav "Jumping Mustangs" (Vietnam), Branson, MO, 9/30-10/4, James Knaefel, (260) 244-3864, jknaefel@gmail.com; **8th Cav 10th Inf Div Basic Trainees - Fort Riley Basic Tng Cos HHC 1st Bn 85th Inf & Item Co 87th Inf Rgt (Dec 1953-Jan 1954)**, George Co 86th Inf Rgt (Feb-Apr 1954), & 8th Cav Rgt (Camp Crawford, & Camp Whittington, Japan, May 1954-Nov 1956), Shawnee Mission, KS, 9/11-13, Steve Bosma, (408) 270-1319, jackremembers@aol.com; **321st "Can Do" Trans Co (Vietnam)**, Aptos, CA, 9/17-21, Bruce Larson, (925) 548-6311, bruceflarsonj@gmail.com; **335th Radio Research Co**, Burlington, VT, 9/10-13, Jim Mossman, (513) 779-7145, jmossman@fuse.net; **919th Eng Co "Red Devils," 919th EAMC (SCARWAF)**, Gettysburg, PA, 10/7-9, Kenneth Wood, (336) 668-4531, woodkp@hotmail.com; **A Trp 3/17th Air Cav "Silver Spurs,"** Branson, MO, 4/20-24, Allan LaGrange, (563) 210-2253, allianlumia@aol.com; **Delta Co 1st Bn (Abn Air Assault), 12th Cav, 1st Cav Div (Airmobile) (Qui Nhon & Central Highlands, Vietnam, 1965)**, San Antonio, 9/29-10/2, Chuck Rose, (210) 854-4131, chuckrose@gvtc.com; **HQ & SVC Btry 6/12 FA**, Colorado Springs, CO, 7/29-31, Michael Longfellow, (217) 260-4794, longfellow38@comcast.net

COAST GUARD

Owasco WHEC 39, Jacksonville, FL, 10/23-24, Frank Boyle, (856) 912-7113, eyeballmi@aol.com

MARINES

C-1-7, Dallas/Fort Worth, TX, 10/15-18, Mike Patrick, (214) 796-7980, mike@thepatrick.name; **Pt 145 (MCRD San Diego, 1964)**, Beaufort, SC, 4/27-30, Don Cobb, (318) 683-3935, cobb145@aol.com

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Post 532, IA: Kenneth A. Thode
Post 161, MI: Kenneth Hallas

IN SEARCH OF

8th Div 167th Inf (Fort Carson, CO & Korea, 1953-1955), James Macomber, (908) 475-8145
48th Sec Police B Flt (Lakenheath RAFB, Suffolk, England, 1967-1971), Dave Lohr, (608) 235-5661, daverohrprf@gmail.com
60th Field Maint Sqdn Jet Engine Shop (Travis AFB, CA, Feb 1971-Apr 1974), Tom Lehto, (503) 369-5345
68th/503rd Eng Depot (Inchon, Korea, 1953-1955), Lynn Howard, (608) 235-4815, lhoward608@aol.com
89th Medium Tank Bn (Korea, 1950-1951), Norman Meeker, (850) 677-8216, [noman28@mediacombb.net](mailto:norman28@mediacombb.net)
93rd Bomb Wing 328th Bomb Sqdn (Castle AFB, CA, May 1957-Dec 1960), William Gene Brack, (830) 792-3922, chaplain@mychaplaininc.com
97th Ftr Sqdn (Wright-Patterson AFB, 1954-1956), George Olson, (907) 947-5543, gereneolson@gmail.com
157th QM Co (Baumholder & Kaiserslautern Army Bases, Germany, 1957-1958), Edward Roberts, eroberts12@cox.net
285th MP Co (Karlsruhe, Germany, 1965), Cecil Roberts, (214) 796-8092, crr41@att.net
507th Eng Depot Maint (Toul, France, 1959-1962), Harold Way, (812) 945-3687, hway1622@tvc.com
531st Tact Ftr Sqdn (Bien Hoa AB, Vietnam, 1968-1969), Ralph Noel, (804) 931-4654, ralph.noel3@gmail.com
575th Trans Co (Vicenza, Italy, 1960-1970), Fred Dintino, (215) 643-7970, fdintino@verizon.net
602nd AAA (1943-1946), Karl Monson, (315) 655-4371
632nd Cbt Support Grp Air Refueling (Binh Thuy, Vietnam, Dec 1967-Dec 1968), Roger Van De Hey, (530) 300-6035
814th CES Sqd Heavy Equipment, Roads & Grounds (Westover AFB, 1965-1970), Joe Lyman, (727) 392-2946, tmartin21@triad.rr.com
899th Composite Grp (Frankfurt, Germany, 1951-1953), Harold Hyatt, (610) 613-2033, halbike@aol.com
A Co 1st Bn 2nd Bde "Alpha Aces" (Army Tng Ctr, Fort Polk, LA, July 1974), Walter Repsher Jr., warjlr1@verizon.net
C-5-56 Nike Hercules Msl Base (Dillsboro, IN, 1962-1965), Murray Fitzgerald, (419) 305-4670, bfbfitz@bright.net
C Btry 4th Msl Bn 57th Arty (Furth, Germany, 1966-1967), Paul Witman, (610) 273-3271
C Co 385th MP Bn (Karlsruhe, Germany, 1965-1968), Cecil Roberts, (214) 796-8092

H&S Co 54th Eng Bn (Cbt) (Leipheim, Germany, 1954-1957), Ed Gaston, (828) 632-7541, edgaston7@gmail.com
HQ 7th Maint Bn Camp Friendship (Korat, Thailand, Jan 1966-Apr 1967), John Carey, (201) 988-4561, jocar436@aol.com
Kasaan Bay CVE 69 (1943-1946), Frank Kilduff, (213) 281-6286, kfilm0@att.net
MARS Radio Stn & Signal Unit/Telephone Ops, XX Corps (Columbus Brks, Fort Hayes, Ohio, 1964), Thomas Nickle, (713) 502-7799, hl9xx@yahoo.com
PCE 897 (1946-1947), Calvin McMickens, (480) 202-2607
Plt 145 1st Bn B Co (MCRD San Diego, 1964), Don Cobb, (318) 683-3935, cobb145@aol.com
VP-56 (Keflavik, Iceland, 1971-1973), Bill Malloy, (508) 395-8264, buickm38@aol.com

TAPS

Joe O. Gamble, Dept. of District of Columbia. Nat'l Distinguished Guests Cmte. Vice Chmn. 2002-2013 and Nat'l Veterans Affairs & Rehab. Cncl. Memb. 2013-2015.
Ralph D. Gardner, Dept. of Montana. Dept. Cmdr. 1991-1992, Nat'l Exec. Cmte. Alt. Memb. 1993-1995, Nat'l Children & Youth Cmsn. Liaison Cmte. Memb. 1995-1996, Nat'l Exec. Cmte. Memb. 1995-1997, Nat'l Mbrshp. & Post Activ. Cmte. Memb. 1997-2001 and Nat'l Veterans Affairs & Rehab. Cmsn. Liaison Cmte. Memb. 1996-1997.
Clayton T. Glenn, Dept. of Nevada. Dept. Cmdr. 1991-1992 and Nat'l Distinguished Guests Cmte. Vice Chmn. 1990-1991.
Doris R. Gross, Dept. of Washington. Dept. Cmdr. 1978-1979, Nat'l Vice Cmdr. 1986-1987, Nat'l Citizens Flag Alliance Dept. Chmn. 1997-2005 and 2006-2009, Nat'l Legis. Cmsn. Memb. 1980-1986, Nat'l Mbrshp. & Post Activ. Cmte. Memb. 1956-1957 and Nat'l Veterans Affairs & Rehab. Cmsn. Consultant 1988-2015.

Wayne E. Hakala, Dept. of Maine. Nat'l Americanism Cncl. Memb. 2014-2015, Nat'l Children & Youth Cmsn. Memb. 2012-2013 and Nat'l Foreign Relations Cncl. Vice Chmn. 2010-2012.

Roy E. Johnston, Dept. of West Virginia. Nat'l Sec. Cncl. Memb. 2014-2015.

George Larsen, Dept. of Kentucky. Nat'l Americanism Cncl. Vice Chmn. 1984-1989 and Nat'l Sec. Cncl. Memb. 1993-2015.

Roy R. Leazer, Dept. of North Carolina. Nat'l Americanism Cncl. Memb. 1994-2015.

Glendon W. Peysar Sr., Dept. of Utah. Dept. Cmdr. 1960-1961.

Stanley W. Reinhard Jr., Dept. of Pennsylvania. Dept. Cmdr. 1985-1986, Nat'l Americanism Cmsn. Memb. 1989-1993, Nat'l Foreign Relations Cncl. Vice Chmn. 1982-1985, Nat'l Mbrshp. & Post Activ. Cmte. Advisory Board Memb. 1993-1999 and Nat'l Sec. Cncl. Vice Chmn. 1978-1981.

Ronald Roberts, Dept. of Illinois. Nat'l Veterans Employment & Education Cncl. Memb. 2013-2015.
Kenneth J. Rourke, Dept. of Florida. Nat'l Distinguished Guests Cmte. Vice Chmn. 2005-2013 and Nat'l Veterans Affairs & Rehab. Cncl. Memb. 2013-2015.

William R. Stalzle, Dept. of Illinois. Nat'l Distinguished Guests Cmte. Vice Chmn. 2007-2013 and Nat'l Veterans Affairs & Rehab. Cncl. Memb. 2013-2015.

Terry L. Woodburn, Dept. of Illinois. Nat'l American Legion Child Welfare Foundation Exec. Secretary 1992-1998, Nat'l Endowment Fund Corp. Secretary 2000-2015, Nat'l Mbrshp. & Post Activ. Advisory Board Memb. 2005-2015, Nat'l American Legion Riders Advisory Cmte. to Internal Affairs Chmn. 2013-2015, Nat'l HQ Americanism, Children & Youth Assistant Director 1983-1991 and Nat'l HQ Americanism, Children & Youth Deputy Director 1991-1998.

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Where there's a will, I want to be in it.

A CHILD went with his father to see a litter of newborn kittens. When he arrived home, he breathlessly informed his mother that there were two boy kittens and two girl kittens.

"How did you know that?" his mother asked.

"Daddy picked them up and looked underneath," the child said. "I think it's printed on the bottom."

A TRAVELING SALESMAN was driving down a country road when he noticed that a three-legged chicken was running alongside his car. He stepped on the gas, but at 50 mph the chicken was still keeping up. After about a mile, the chicken ran up into a barn behind an old farmhouse.

The salesman had time to kill, so he drove up the lane. He knocked at the door, and when the farmer answered he told him what he'd just seen.

The farmer knew about the chicken. "As a matter of fact," he said, "my son is a geneticist, and he developed this breed of chicken because he and his mother and I all like a drumstick when we have dinner. This way we only kill one chicken."

"Wow," the salesman said. "How do they taste?"

"I don't know. We can't catch them."

A LAWYER had a leaky faucet in his office bathroom. He got the number of a nearby plumber and called him in. The plumber arrived and in five minutes had repaired the faucet. Washing his hands, he told the lawyer, "That will be \$150."

"That's outrageous!" the lawyer exclaimed. "That's more money than I make in an hour."

"I know," the plumber said. "That's why I quit being a lawyer."



"Once my belly's scratched, I can be talked into just about anything."



"Almost. You came in a close second to the coffeemaker."

A BOY doing his homework asked his father, "Will you help me find the least common denominator?"

"It hasn't been found yet?" his father replied.

"They were looking for it when I was a kid!"

AN EXHAUSTED HUNTER stumbled into a camp.

"Am I glad to see you," he said. "I've been lost for three days."

"Don't get too excited," the other hunter replied. "I've been lost for three weeks."

“THE GOVERNMENT released hundreds of documents seized from Osama bin Laden's compound. Among the items is a job application for al-Qaida. It's like a regular job application except it asks questions like, 'Where do you see yourself exploding in the next five years?'"

– Jimmy Kimmel



"I don't know what it is, but I have this sudden urge to kick this pig through that tree."

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